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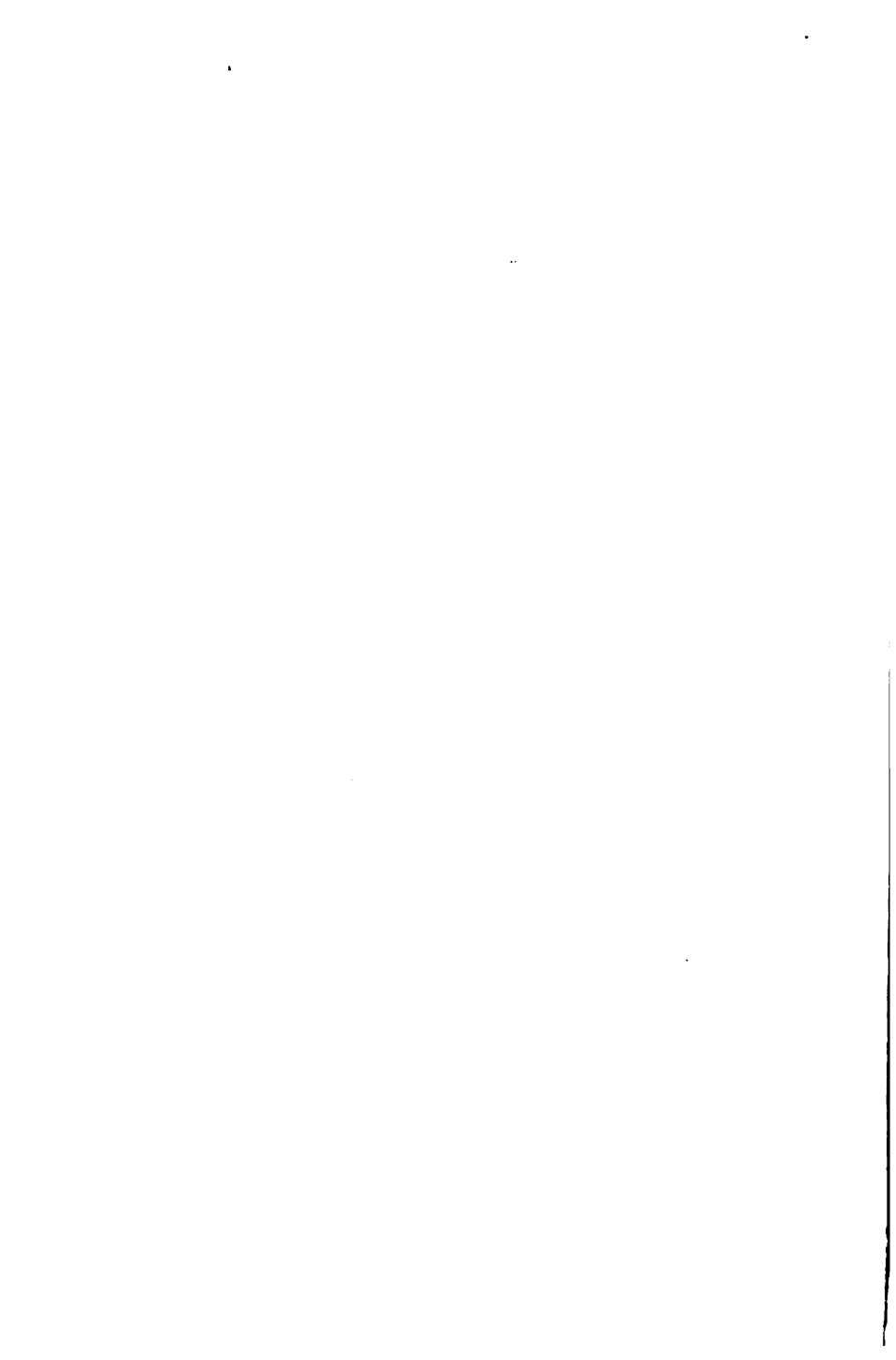
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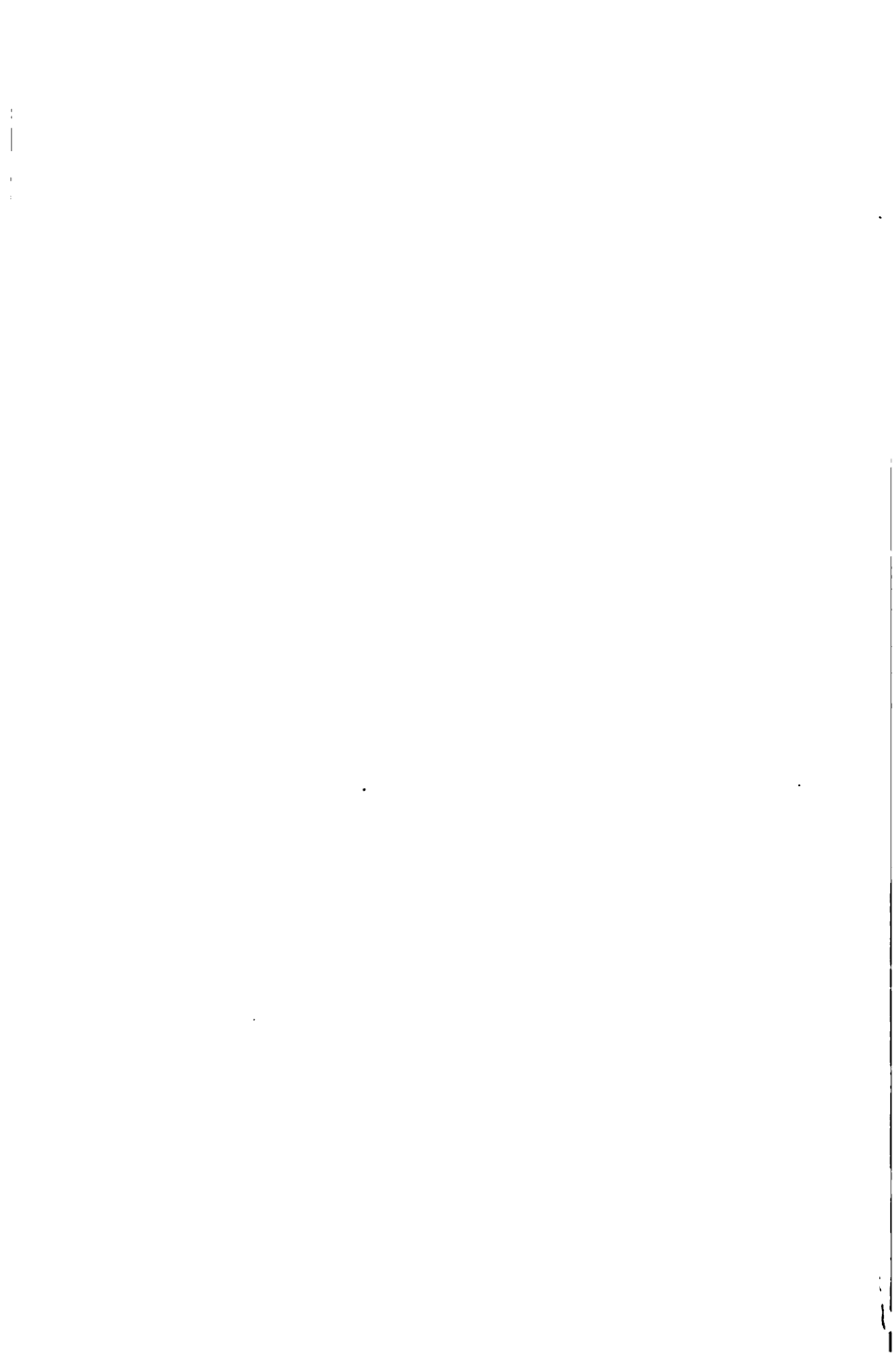
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A. D.





*In and Out of a French
Country-House*





A STREET IN LISIEUX

100



In and Out of a French Country-House

By

Anna Bowman Dodd

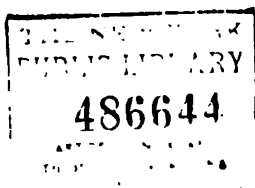
*Author of "Three Normandy Inns,"
"Cathedral Days," etc.*

*With illustrations by
Robert Demachy*



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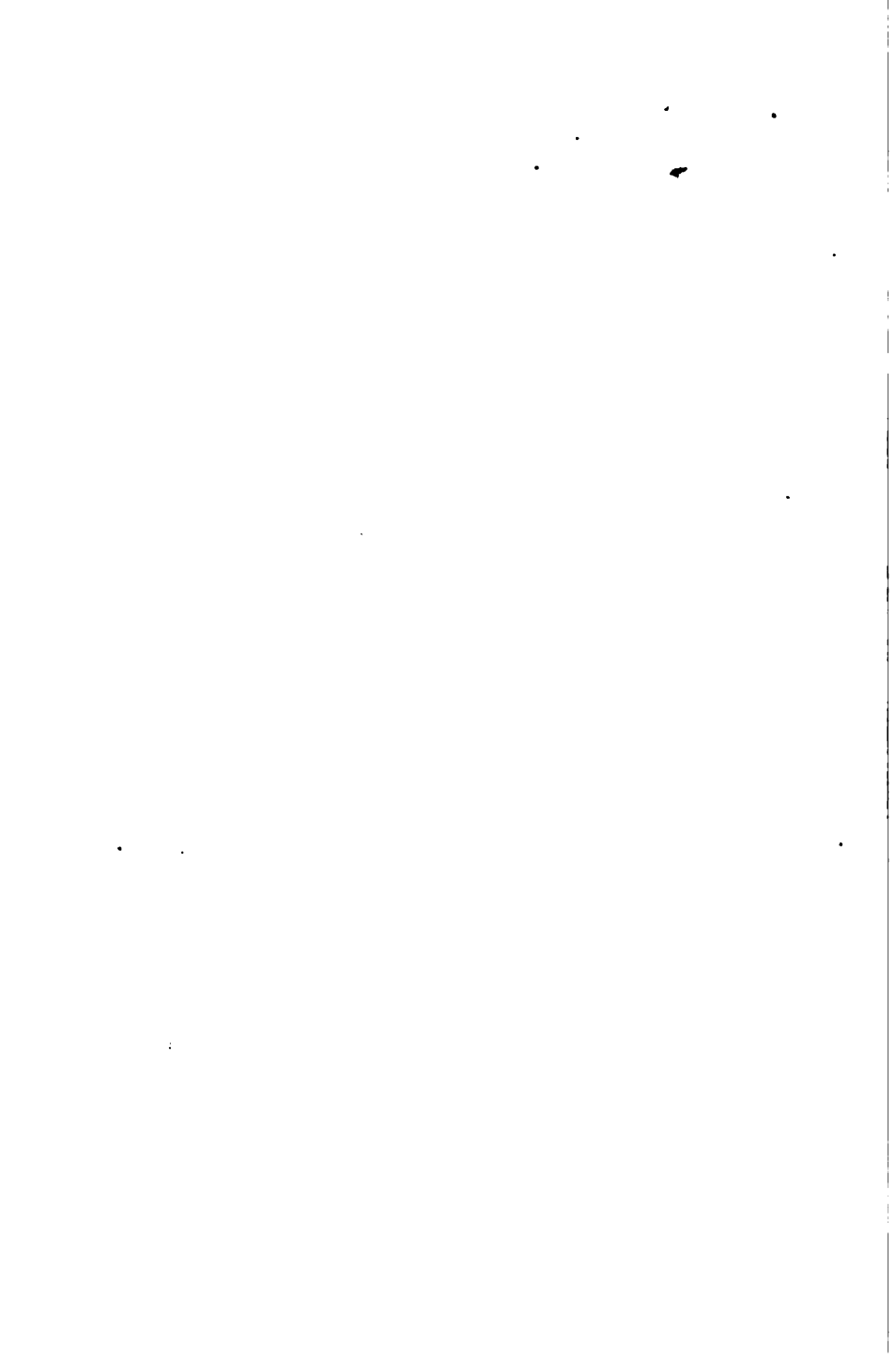


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Chapter I

ON A NORMANDY HIGHROAD

I WAS walking on the Honfleur highroad, on my way toward the Pennedepie church. Close to the edifice, I met the curé. He was reading the office of the hour. The May skies were holding above the book their glowing tapers of the sunset, and the birds, on their way to their nests, were caroling songs as pure as though sung by the pope's choir.

"You looked pleased, Monsieur le Curé. I hope good news has come your way"—for I noted the sparkle in the deep brown eyes.

I was first given a glance to which the uttered words were no clew.

"No-o, not precisely good news—yet—all the same—"

There came a pregnant pause; the clever eyes searched my face warily, reflecting a certain conflict—was I really to be trusted? After all, I was undeniably a Protestant and a foreigner; still I was a neighbor, and, it appeared, in some ways, I had proved myself a good friend to France. The scale tipped in my favor.

The breviary was closed; a finger was left within

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the leaves. With a glance that raked the roadway, in front and back of us, the curé came a few inches nearer to my side of the highway.

In a gleeful tone, he murmured, "I have had such a morning! Such an amusing morning!"

Once again the road was swept with his furtive gaze; and then, presently, he burst forth, with cumulative, yet soft laughter:

"You must know that it was to-day—yes—before noon, that Monsieur le Maire, his adjoint, *tout son monde, enfin*, did my poor house the honor—after the church had been searched—to pay me an official visit. Yes." And my friend the curé nodded, to what he was well aware was passing through my own mind.

"Well, and what did they find?" I asked, eagerly. For, of course, this tour of inspection could have but one object in view, the taking of an inventory of all the treasures of the church, provided there were any.

My answer was first an eloquent gesture. The curé spread his hands wide, the breviary playing its part in the pose.

"What was there to find? I ask you that?" And the smile that met my eyes was as roguish as a boy's. "Those gentlemen gave themselves a most unnecessary bad quarter of an hour. They arrive, it is true, in a fine carriage—the state sends

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them forth in grand style—but, though they are cool when they arrive, *ma foi*, the sweat pours down the official brows, once they begin to search.” His laughter shook the *soutane* of this Norman—who had been a Norman peasant before the church had made of him a clever priest.

“You never lifted a finger to help—of that I feel perfectly sure——”

“To help!” Now, it was that this true son of the church showed his ecclesiastical teeth. “In the name of all that is just and right, why should I be called upon to help those who would rifle the House of God?” But he checked himself; he repressed his mounting anger. With a quick return to his easy, non-committal manner, he went on. “I did more than to help—I gave these gentlemen the freedom of my house, yes, of my very attic. I first showed them about the church, the sacristy, not a nook in the old building that was not passed in review. Then I stood on the threshold of my presbytery, and, with my best grace, I said, ‘Pray enter, gentlemen, the house is yours.’ Then they begin to climb, and climb, and search and search. One hears them poking under bureaux, and pounding mattresses, and banging doors. And their oaths were loudest of all. For the day was hot! *Le bon Dieu* meant they should suffer a little! *Ces messieurs les socialistes*

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ar'n't used to hard work, now, since they are in power. How they puffed and swore! It was scandalous!"

The curé's relish of the scene was betrayed, however, by his uncontrolled laughter; the sense of humor in the rude peasant base was stronger than the acquired good manners of clerical severity.

Presently he went on. "You should have seen them after the visit was ended. The mayor looked as though he had had a fit in my attic! *Sapristi!* But it is a furnace up there, at high noon, in this early heat. And his aid, he was as pale as pastry. And both were furious. 'And so yours is a poor parish, after all we have heard, Monsieur le Curé? But perhaps the treasures are kept well out of the way—perhaps, you also, as had the monks in the olden days—perhaps you have underground passages!' You see, they were trying to make me angry with their scorn. I only said, '*Cherchez, Messieurs, look!* I have said it—the house, the underground passages, if there be any, are yours.'" And a dramatic gesture was made, with open hands and breviary.

Here the curé took time to mop his brow. Then he added quietly, "But they had had enough. They climbed into their carriage, no wiser than when they came."

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"And all the time, the church treasures were safely——"

My indiscretion was promptly punished. The curé's powerful hand was laid upon my arm. All he said was, "When you come to mass, you will see a great change."

Yet he knew that I knew where the holy relics, in their beautiful gothic shrines, and the rare fifteenth century altar ornaments lay hidden.

"*Tiens*," he broke out, with joyous accent, "there comes Monsieur le Marquis!" His exclamation was an excuse for us to look the other squarely in the eye, and to burst into unrestrained laughter.

The appearance of the Marquis de Pennedepie was as opportune as though the little scene had been an act in a high-class comedy. With the instinct of the Frenchman to play up to his part, these two conspirators, if conspirators they were, made the most of the situation.

Both the marquis and the curé bowed ceremoniously, the curé's salute being the lower of the two. On the faces of both was that look of conscious innocence that betrays so many a secret—and women.

The visit of the mayor was never mentioned. The heat of the day was referred to, incidentally. The health of Madame the Marquise was anxiously in-

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quired after—with as much solicitude as though Monsieur le Curé had not dined opposite that lady, after having beaten her at their usual double-dummy game, the very evening before this meeting.

Presently the curé made an excuse for leaving, and swept us his “*bonsoir*.”

Would the marquis be as hard to move as had been the son of the church? This gentleman appeared, at least, to be in a gay, communicative mood. He broke out at once with, “Well, Madame, and you do not ask me my news?” The news, announced thus openly, had, obviously no more connection with church ornaments than with the treasures of an infidel mosque.

“I do ask it—and with all the avidity of a provincial.”

The marquis laughed, but he still held back. He, too, must make his little effect.

“And you think I can stand here, and wait?” I finally cried, living up to the attitude expected of me.

The marquis threw his fine head backwards; he let his pleased laughter reward me.

“You must know, *chère dame*, that I have at last sold Quatre Tours, and also that my dear friend the Baron de Gaspé-Royal has come to live at Bois-vert.”

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"As I never before heard of this gentleman with the sonorous name, my pulse is quite normal."

"You have such an amusing way of putting things," softly laughed the marquis.

"The truth is always amusing, when it isn't an affront. But tell me about the sale of the Château. That does thrill me."

The feudal castle of the de Pennedepies had been sold, it appeared, to a Parisian maker of umbrellas. The marquis proceeded to indulge in a little innocent merriment, at the expense of this worthy bourgeois.

"Figure to yourself, Madame, that all the years this creature was making umbrella sticks, he was nourishing an ideal. This dream took the shape of a château, dating back to the time of Charlemagne. It must have four towers, and they must be intact—also, there must be a moat, with real swans."

He paused; then he said quietly, "And so, you perceive, Quatre Tours was built and planned, exactly eleven centuries ago, for this maker of parasols!"

"You take it calmly."

The shrug of the philosopher was given, and then, "What will you? *Chacun son tour*. My ancestors lived, for centuries, like princes, reigning over forty villages. And now I am quite content with that

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little *pavillon*, up there," pointing to the hill on which stood the modest villa the de Pennedepies had taken, "to be near the sea" being the reason given, and not, of course, the true one.

These neighbors, like ourselves, were new-comers along this Honfleur coast. With their advent, there had been introduced into our neighborhood a quality of charm that even in France is becoming rarer and rarer. Both the marquis and his wife had preserved, in a somewhat remarkable way, the flavor of old-time courtesies, a gracious and delicate gaiety, as though their ancestors, though they had robbed them of their fortunes, in exchange, had bequeathed them the art of living beautifully. This change from the semi-royal state of their feudal castle to this villa, had been accepted as though one entirely due to choice.

"My wife, you see, adores the sea, and now we can live up there without a care. So draughty, those big *châteaux*—though we burned up all our woods—all that were left"—here the marquis laughed softly, as though the joke of cutting down timber that was as valuable as so many bank-notes particularly appealed to his sense of humor. "Yes, although we piled the great fireplaces high, we were always cold. And now—but look! what a beautiful woman!" he suddenly cried, in a ringing voice.

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My friend's eyes were on a passing automobile, or rather on a shape leaning forward from the open windows of the car.

The marquis would not have been a Frenchman had he not instinctively hastened his step, as though the feet of sixty—with an ancestral handicap of gout—could compete with what seemed to be, at the very least, a sixty-horse power speed. For the automobile had passed us as lightning flashes.

To our amazement, the car was brought to a quick stop. 'A lady's head pushed far beyond the side of the carriage, had a familiar outline. The voice, the next instant, left no further doubt. It was the clear, crisp, Bostonian *staccato*.

"But—surely—it is you!"

In another moment, Carola Marlborough had alighted, had swept down the road, and had her arms about me.

It was in direct contradiction with my painstaking analysis of Carola's character that I should have experienced surprise in having her thus enfolded, on a Normandy highway. For her descent anywhere—as a mythological nymph, in pagan literature, is forever emerging from any convenient collection of woodland bushes—was the one certainty on which one could count. 'As this erratic beauty was supposed to be touring in Brittany, it was quite nat-

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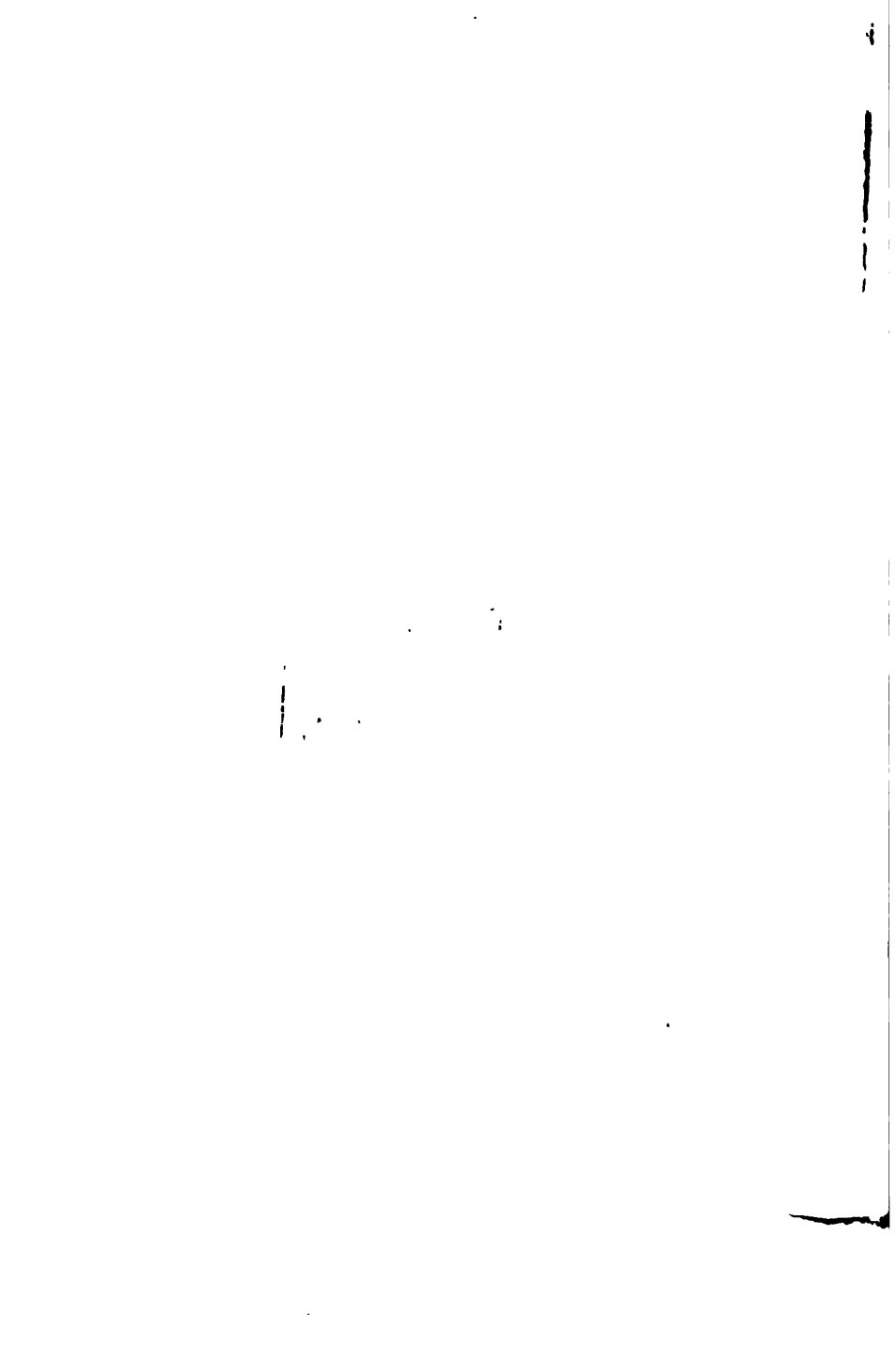
ural to find her breaking forth into panegyrics of this Normandy coast-road.

It was in perfect keeping, indeed, with Carola Marlborough's insequent habit of making plans and breaking them, that, for some days past, there had been a continuous firing-in of telegrams. There had been several Marconis from Carola's ship; some of these had been of the length of an up-to-date letter. In one she announced she had ordered her car to meet her at Cherbourg—a few hours after landing she would be in "wonderful Normandy." The next telegram brought news of a change of plan. "Going first to tour in Brittany. Am writing!" So completely consonant with Carola's character was this latter dispatch, that her hastily decided-upon trip scarcely evoked surprised comment.

Carola Marlborough's capricious uncertainty was, perhaps, a component part of her charm. It was impossible to imagine her as imprisoned in inflexible purpose, or fettered to an over-conscientious consideration for others. Her world was peopled with those whose chief duty was self-gratification, those who had made a religion of pleasure. Fate and circumstances, from the first, had, indeed, cradled Carola herself into the belief that life offered unending opportunities for making it a perpetual holiday; she entertained a noble scorn for those to whom cer-

A BRETON FISH-WIFE





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tain forms of high-class adventure were unimaginable.

This sudden change of plan was one way of Carola's courting adventure. What an exploit to arrive, unheralded, unannounced! She had had time to reflect, after sending her last telegram, that, after all, an historic Manoir was wanting to her collection of antiquities. She would take a spin along the coast, inspect the house, hear all the news, and make a rush for Brittany, on the morrow.

This, and much more, was told in a series of brisk sentences; and then Carola turned to the real business in hand. To chance on as distinguished looking a *grand seigneur* as the Marquis de Penne-depie, as the very first reward of her impulsive move, was a situation none could better live up to than John Marlborough's widow. This clever mistress of opportunity as instinctively set about the immediate capture of the nearest male—were he worth the effort—as a *comédienne* of the "Français" proceeds to play up to a full house.

Although Carola opened fire by talking about the scenery, she began her usual fatal method of letting her eyes pretend to betray the real nature of the speaker.

"Are there many such roads in France, Monsieur, as this one, between Trouville and Honfleur?"

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"It is, as you say, a very beautiful road," tamely responded the marquis. His wit appeared to have suddenly deserted him. But not so his Frenchman's talent for a rapid and experienced survey of Carola's charms. It was not only her expressive eyes he was studying—there was the health of the clear American complexion—such a wonder of freshness compared to the *maquillé* skins of Frenchwomen! And there were the dazzling teeth, another novelty. There were also the slim lines of the supple figure, proving the high physical condition of one who had "the Tallien beauty of line—that line she and the Récamier were so proud of, inventing the Greek style of dress to show off what otherwise would have remained hidden," as the marquis said, a few days later, when he came to talk over Carola's perfections.

There was a quality of charm far more modern than Carola's "Greek line." Her ever-changing, restless mode of life; her passion for high speed and change of scene; her light, but never-satisfied curiosity concerning life, literature, ruins, and the emotions had communicated to Carola's character a certain illusive, fantastic attraction,—that magnetic drawing that makes us follow Colombin's ready spring through trap-doors, to see her reappear with the smile of those whose chief business in life it is to court adventure.

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Men were quick to discern this effective note in the fascinating widow's complex nature; its serious Boston base, and its new-world superstructure of airy, open-windowed invitation to every wind that blew, made pursuit doubly alluring.

The marquis would have been entirely at sea had one attempted thus to account for his delight in watching each change in Carola's expressive face. He was only conscious of her beauty and of the music in her clear notes.

"Such orchards running down to the sea! And look—up yonder—at that hill that seems to be toppling over us—with its green crown. It's exactly like those slopes in the Albrecht Dürer prints——"

"It is easy to see you are an artist, Madame," was the ardent comment.

But Carola was already off—her galloping mind following after another swift thought. She was now asking:

"Is your wonderful Manoir on this road? And where shall I tell the chauffeur and Miss West to go?" The latter was Carola's "Puritan bridle," as she was pleased to call her prim companion. The proper directions given, my friend continued to pour forth a fusillade of questions—a steady firing I found refreshing—as being eminently a national trait. She hurried on:

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"How did you hear of this Manoir? 'And how old is it—really? Has it a Terror history? To whom does it belong? And why—if it is so perfect, hav'n't you bought it?"

The marquis' glance, as it met mine, with a merry twinkle, said, "Well, now let us see you take your revenge." Instead, I took my time. Several years' intimacy with Carola's capricious flights had prepared me for watching for the next move. I had barely achieved a rapid rendering of our finding of the old place, when any further explanations were cut short.

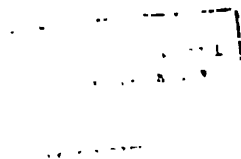
"What a charming looking woman!" This remark was evoked by the appearance of a lady driving along the road; she was seated beside her groom, her head almost on a level with our own, for the pony cart she was driving was one of those toy vehicles grown people, in France, make constant use of, fancying themselves in them, as being "so English!"

The Vicomtesse de Castel gave our group a rapid, investigating glance; she bowed; and, her eyes, as they met her friend's the marquis', said, through the veil of the becoming lace mesh and the more questionably attractive frame of the darkened rims, "And whom have we here?"

"You will have to go no later than to-morrow, Monsieur, to answer that question," I said.



A PICTURESQUE CORNER—VILLESVILLE



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"What question?" was Carola's eager echo.

"You see, Madame, what a sensation your mere appearance creates. Our friend the Vicomtesse will not sleep until she knows all about you," smiled down the marquis.

"Yes, I know the feeling. 'After I have been at my place on the Beverly shore for a month, I can't see a new car pass without a positive ache of curiosity. It's a disease living in the country breeds——"

We agreed to that. But wasn't this curiosity better than the town malady of rushing—of finding all interest centered in novelty?—the marquis asked. And we agreed to that. And by this time we had reached the little green gate that led into the Manoir gardens.

"Already?" sighed Carola. "Must we leave all these Corots, and Bretons, and Troyons we have been seeing—now, when the glow is at its very brightest?"

"You will find you are exchanging one picture gallery for another," was the marquis' courteous rejoinder. "But, since you find our corner of France attractive now, you should see it in August, when the Trouville season is in full swing."

"Alas! I am condemned to a touring trip! But," Carola added quickly, "I do not see why I should not come back—for the races—in August——"

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"I hold you to that promise, Madame"—and the marquis kissed her hand—as though to seal the bond.

Carola bent her eyes upon the finely shaped head that, for a single second, remained motionless, neither hurrying nor yet unduly lingering over the agreeable salute.

"I will come, Monsieur," she murmured softly. "And, I always keep my promises," she added, with an accent as sincere as though she believed herself possessed of the talent.

"What a perfect dear! Are all your neighbors as complete as he?" Carola's eyes followed the Frenchman's tall, soldierly figure, with its light grace of swing, as it strode briskly down the roadway.

"Spare him, Carola,—have a little mercy! Remember, he is sixty—he's married—and they have just sold the ancestral château."

Carola had her finger on her lip. And although she frowned, and laughed, I was made sensible of a perceptible drop in the thermometer. What she said was, "How ridiculous you are! Come, let us go in."

With her foot on the steps of the stairs leading into the grounds, she halted. Her hands were now

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in mid-air, as she shrieked gayly, "My dear! Why didn't you tell me? It's divine!"

With us, also, it had been a case of love at first sight. Who, indeed, could have remained insensible to such beauty? Or who, having yielded to the conquering charm, could resist the stirring appeal—the more persuasive for being mute—at least to attempt the release of the place from the ever-encroaching coil of neglect and decay? Even on a tour of inspection, one's first, rash impulse was to tear away, in the park, at the ropes of weeds, and, within the Manoir—within the historical Manor-House—to strip bare the noble oak panelings of their disfiguring bourgeois wall-papers.

The trail of the bourgeois was, indeed, over the whole place. And everyone knows what the taste of the middle-class man and woman is, in France. And yet—and yet—what an aspect of noble dignity! How triumphantly had distinction—had this grand air of mingled simplicity and splendor—persisted!

The grounds, the park and gardens, one saw at a glance, had been laid out in the great period. Here was a scenic setting, more or less complete, for a more gracious, a more perfectly organized society than our own. In the hush of that still May day there beat a faint, but very insistent vibration;—one had the sense, the certitude, of having one's

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finger on the pulse of the past, on that far-away time when beauty was a cult, and when taste and leisure were a heritage.

One almost looked to see a well-known group,—a Watteau gathering, for example,—seated beneath yonder monster bouquet, the one across the carriage-road, formed of elms and lindens that had been caught—and taught—young, exactly how to grow so as to present an imposing structural effect. Had the beauty of that group tripped forth, in her powder, her flowery brocade, and her hand on her tall cane—a hand that had never held anything heavier than a rose, or weightier than a billet-doux—had this eighteenth-century bit of fine porcelaine wandered forth, she would have found the Manoir lawns, their parterres, the allées in the park—with their Versailles length and breadth—yes—even the very salons and the closets within the old house, presenting the old, familiar, decorative background.

The frame was still intact. There were salons whose carvings would have found favor in the eyes of that exacting art-critic—Madame de Pompadour. There were mysterious, dark, little rooms—too small for a bed-chamber, too large for a closet—whose thick doors, once closed, would imprison the fair one, as the *coiffeur* let the powder fly. And there were old, discolored mirrors hung at precisely the

In and Out of a French Country-House

right angle for the placing of the "assassinating mouche."

Once in possession of this historic Manoir, there came to me a creeping sense of despair. The power that lay in the past was a bit overwhelming. Perhaps that Watteau beauty was in reality the only figure that would fit into this antique frame. . . .

There was a hateful owl that hooted away, at night, from his lonely palace of a thousand holes—his palace of the huge octagonal pigeon-house—one of the few *colombiers* still left intact, in France. This bird of the dark was as cynical, as scornful as any old-school Frenchman of the boulevards, confronting the foreign invasion. "You'll never do it!" he hooted, night after night. But this particular owl had still something to add to his supposed store of wisdom; he had never before been brought face to face with an American, with her teeth set to reconstruct an abandoned Manoir.

Chapter II

SOME VISITORS

THERE is, surely, no greater folly than to quarrel with one's age. This dose of philosophy I had occasion to administer, on the following morning, quite early in the day; for Carola's unalterable decision to "make the run to Dinard" before dusk, that she might see the country by daylight, precipitated an unconquerable feeling of depression.

There followed a drop in the registering of agreeable sensations. Many-sided natures like Carola's, when they leave us, carry away something of ourselves. They increase, very perceptibly, the moral ozone of the atmosphere; and, by living intensely themselves, they force those about them to a more buoyant optimism, to a more accelerated pace in the universal *joie de vivre*.

But the adventure of the road! What is comparable to that promise of novelty? To court thus the unknown, to fly, with eager gesture, to lift the curtain that hides the next surprise—the coming emotion, the rare delight—who, in our century of unrest, willingly remains on the hearthstone, when, at the turn of the wheel, one can roll to fresh worlds,

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on the modern magic carpet—the macadam of good roads?

And thus it was we lost her. There was the bustle and flurry of an early departure; there were farewells waved from the windows of the gliding car; and over the bunch of roses, that, for rivals in color, had the forget-me-nots of Carola's eyes, came the gay, but scarcely convincing cry, "Remember!—I come back for the races!"

Although a particularly gifted songster took up the note that rang upon the air, and then one bird sang, and still another, wrens and robins could not drown the echo of the lost accents.

The click of the latch of the little green gate—the gate that led directly upon the coast-road—brought a change of mood. For to live on a high-road, in this busy corner of France, is to find a motley company passing in and out of one's gates.

A fisherman, with the salt of the sea still on his rough beard, came to proffer the spoils of his net. He was followed by a soldier, whose brilliant new uniform announced there was a tearful farewell to be taken of his cousin, the gardener, since *le petit soldat* was off to "do" his twenty-eight days. And a separation of twenty-eight days in France—!

No sooner had the touching salutations between

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the two cousins been interchanged, than the brown sister—*Sœur Joseph*, in religion—appeared. Tall and dark, she moved down the garden path with the noiseless step of monastic training. Her thick brown habit and spotless coiffe brought into astonishing relief the reds of the tulips. Her voice, soft and low, pleading the needs of her order, was presently succeeded by the song of a passing peasant. The notes, strong and lusty, rang out upon the warm May air like a challenge—the challenge youth flings forth to fate—when the sap of spring is rising in the vigorous Norman frame.

Fainter and fainter the song died away, as the singer swung down the slope of the hill.

Then, along the gravel of the carriage-road, there rang the rattle of clinking horses' hoofs. In another instant, above the yellow wheels of her English T cart, I perceived the Titian-colored tresses of the little Vicomtesse de Castel.

She had barely alighted, when the latch of the green gate announced another visitor.

"*Tiens!* The Marquis!" was the well-feigned, surprised exclamation.

The accelerated animation of Monsieur de Penne-depie's step, the faint color on his usually pallid cheeks, and, above all, his careful toilet, made the ceremonious greetings, and the "Dear lady! what

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an unexpected pleasure!" merely the polite screen to mask a pre-arranged meeting.

For, of course, it was a rendezvous—but what more natural, in France? Although I divined the motive of this encounter, I also knew it to be ungallic at least in one essential—the design of the meeting was patterned in lines of absolute purity. Had the Marquis been ten years younger, or the Vicomtesse less anxious a mother—for what time has a French parent for coquetry, with three daughters on the matrimonial carpet?—and who knows what character such an interview might have assumed?

As things stood, the little Vicomtesse did not immediately bring forward the motive of her coming. There was an hour or more before her.

"And your beautiful guest—shall we not have the pleasure of seeing her this afternoon?" she asked, politely; and she adjusted her veil to bring the black dots directly under her brilliant—and artistically decorated—eyes, her most renowned physical asset.

I regretted Madame Marlborough's being, at this particular moment, at Avranches; she had much better have been sipping her tea here, under the cool of the allée.

"What a lovely creature! I never remember to

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have seen a more beautiful woman," was the admiring tribute of the marquis.

"Yes, she is indeed beautiful to look upon—and her charm only deepens when one really knows her."

The little vicomtesse began to show signs of uneasiness. She had not driven several miles out of her way to hear another woman's attractions praised.

"How about this young Baron de Gaspé-Royale?" she suddenly asked, turning a questioning face to the marquis. "Is it true he is to live at Boisvert?"

"He is already in possession," was the pleased answer. And the marquis crossed his long legs with immense satisfaction.

For here was a situation, and a topic exactly suited to the marquis' vocation, since he belonged to that order of *grands seigneurs* whose vocation it is to do nothing, but to do it beautifully. To be sought as the font of information, to be consulted on this momentous event—this coming of his friend the Baron to live at Boisvert, to talk of this exciting event, and to give out, piecemeal, choice bits of news that would interest but not really betray, as well as secretly to ponder on all the motives that had led up to this extraordinary decision,—such diverting occupations supplied the marquis with an inexhaustible fund of interest.

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He began, almost immediately, to enlarge on the extraordinary beauty of the Château de Boisvert.

The château stood in the midst of its wide fields, he told us. It had an aristocrat's air of remoteness. Thousands of motorists flew past its ramparts of tall hedges, caught a fleeting glance of the magnificent avenues of beeches, and, with the quick look that is the visual characteristic of our day, would summarize, "All the châteaux in France are deserted!"

Deserted, in a certain sense, the marquis admitted the noble old seat might be considered to have been; but it had known how to keep the secret of both its beauty and its state. Its builders had happily caught the prevailing Louis XII. fashions. One would have to go as far as Blois to find brick and cement as neatly laid. Later courtier-owners had added wings, with the taller Mansard roofs.

"Though they were privileged to see the 'Roi Soleil' every morning, in his shirt, these gentlemen were also allowed to visit their own property, if only long enough to admit of their 'eating the pastry'—(the Norman phrase 'manger la galette,' for collecting rents)," the narrator said, with a laugh. From time immemorial, the Barons de Gaspé-Royale had thus, it appeared, treated Boisvert. The place had been looked upon as "pastry," much as a

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provident Normandy farmer estimates a favorite milch cow.

"How many feasts have these rich Normandy pastures paid for? how many gorgeous brocaded suits and jeweled stomachers? 'And, in the reign of the late Baron, one of the most noted of grand seigneurs—you know—in the time of the Empire, when a great noble was chiefly distinguished by refusing to make his bow at the court of the last of the Napoleons,—how many long years of baccarat debts has Boisvert wiped out? Ha! ha! a high liver was the old Baron! I knew him and well!"

The present owner of Boisvert had been true to some of the traditions of his fathers. He also had come, in former years, but once a year to his Norman property. These visits were short. They were planned, apparently, with a view to secrecy, the young Baron appearing like a thief in the night. Arriving mysteriously at nightfall, he as silently had stolen away.

"Ah—he's of a romantic turn of mind! Well, he promises to be an interesting addition to the neighborhood," was the Vicomtesse's eager comment. Then, pinching her lips, till they were even redder than the *pâte rouge* had colored them, she queried, in a casual tone, as though the vital question were merely an afterthought, "(Then he has not left Tours and Louprouge to economize—I presume!"

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The Marquis gave her back an enlightened side-glance. "The Baron's real reason for leaving Louprouge, is that something has gone wrong there—not finances—Gaston is a careful man. But he is sensitive—*un sensitif*. He runs away when things go wrong, in his world——"

"Ah, you know him, then, well?"

"Our grounds touched, at Tours—his woods and ours were separated by a barbed-wire fence, which was taken down, in the hunting season."

"Is the shooting well preserved?" asked the lady, her practical mind working actively.

"Everything Gaston does is perfectly done. Even his illusions are built of solid masonry."

The laughter that greeted this remark was followed by the quick comment, "But Paris—Paris, surely, has cured the Baron of illusions?"

The Marquis answered, with a shrug, that his friend had never seemed to care for Parisian gayeties. "He has urban tastes—a lover of the country—of nature, rather——"

The Vicomtesse gave forth a skeptical little laugh. She glanced sideways, her head cocked with a knowing air, as she insinuated:

"You say the Baron rarely goes up to Paris? He has an attachment, then, a—hum—in Tours?" The Vicomtesse was, indeed, always scenting an impropriety. It was her way of letting this provincial

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neighborhood know she, at least, had lived in Paris, and knew the world.

The Marquis smiled. "No-o, chère dame, I do not think my friend goes in for affairs. He prefers horses, I think, to the ladies."

There was an outburst of indignation.

"The monster! A woman-hater? Well, we must cure him! He has a history, then? No man, young and handsome—you said he was good-looking?—no man turns his back on women unless he has had a trick, of some sort, played on him." This last was said with authority, by the little Vicomtesse.

"Perhaps," acquiesced the Marquis, with a wise smile, "who really knows the secret of any one? All the same, I do not think Gaston has ever been bitten, badly. He is rather a serious young man, you see."

"Well, we shall have to make him smile. Once his first visit made, I'll ask the de St. Auberts, and the——"

Here the Marquis laughed, audibly. "But you see, dear lady, the Baron will never make the first, nor any other visit. He is a veritable hermit. He comes to see us, to see my wife. I really believe he is fond of Germaine. But even to us he comes secretly, when no other visitors can possibly drop

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in. He will appear for his cup of morning coffee. He knows we take it on the terrace. On rainy days he will come for Tea. He comes to chat and to eat hot scones. You should see him eat scones!" The Marquis' eyes now over-ran with mirth, with a certain delicate irony, as he thus betrayed his friend.

He listened patiently, while I expounded the theory that a man who had a passion for sweets, if considered from the standpoint of a hermit, was a fraud.

"How can you reconcile eating hot scones, on a terrace, with a charming woman, and a passion for solitude? I repeat, your friend is a fraud! In reality, he is a lover of good society and a gourmet!"

"Gaston a fraud? Dear me—no—he is the most sincere, the most loyal of men. 'Apart from his little malady—his dislike of society may indeed be called a disease—he is really adorable—so my wife says."

"Then, he is lacking in courage. If he is timid—and timidity in a man——"

The Marquis fairly sprang from his chair. His features were twisted, in their earnestness. "Gaston not courageous! Dear lady, you should see him stick a wild boar! Even as the most daring among his crusading ancestors impaled a dog of a saracen, so he attacks his big game—the same stroke."

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"Well," I continued, contentiously, "Then I am not so sure his 'little disease' as you call his eccentric hatred of the world, is not a pose, *Tenez*, no longer than last evening, I saw him, this wonderful Baron of yours. He was in a costume that was not exactly in keeping with a passion for solitude."

"You saw him?" suspiciously queried my friend, his eyes suddenly keen and gray.

"Yes, face to face. Don't start. We were driving after dinner, last night, to get more breeze, along the Pont l'Evêque road. In front of his great gates, stood your Baron—in full dress! He could not have been more magnificent—what with his silken hose, low shoes, his boutonnière, and his décolleté vest, had he been going to court!"

This time the Marquis laughed heartily. "His décolleté! Yes, our evening vests are cut absurdly low, now. Gaston is certain to have the very latest agony. You see, he observes all the little ceremonies of his world, except those that really count. He would consider he had disgraced his name did he not dress for dinner every night—but to make a visit, or to receive one—not if flight be possible."

Monsieur de Pennedepie suddenly stopped. He leaned forward, to rise quickly, as he cried, "There is my wife!"



Chapter III

MATRIMONIAL PLOTTING

THE slight figure of the Marquise was seen at the entrance of the allée. She was making her way toward us, with a certain haste. In her hand she held a letter. On her delicate features was a look of mingled anxiety and excitement.

There were the usual more or less elaborate greetings, common among friends, in France. The lady then fixed her husband with a glance laden with meaning, and the words "Hélène is coming!" She stood, rigid and upright, after delivering her news.

The effect produced was dramatic. The Marquis staggered backwards, half in play, but really to cover an amazement that obviously was not tinged with delight, as he exclaimed:

"You say——?"

"That your charming friend arrives by the two o'clock train."

The Marquis fell back in his chair. He folded his hands with resignation.

"I don't understand in the least."

"How like a man! Surely, my dear, as you know Hélène, there is nothing extraordinary in her

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writing to say she will make us a visit, a short one!" Madame gave her spouse a malicious glance.

Again her husband sought indulgence for his body in the depths of his *chaise-longue*. For his perturbed mind, he offered the solace of a softened growl.

"For the remainder of the season, you mean!"

His wife laughed, with light mockery, as she turned to us. "He makes the same fuss every time Hélène comes to us—he, also, is the one who ends by imploring her to stop on." There was indulgence, understanding, and amusement in the fond smile. In the pale blue eyes there was a tender gaiety.

"You are telling me that this lady is pretty, perhaps beautiful, that she has charm, and also, that she is impulsive——"

Again the Marquis bounded from his chair. "Madame de Grasse impulsive! Ha! ha! if she only were—but we are all made to play her little game. The great question is, what is she coming here for? The journey from Les Vosges is a long one, and the season at Trouville has not yet begun."

"How cruel you are! But, wait till she comes—you will be on your knees, as you always are. You must know——" and Madame turned to the Vicomtesse, "that Hélène de Grasse is adorable. She has every quality. Her eyes, her figure, her complexion,

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all are perfect. 'As for her smile, so sad, so tender——"

"It is the smile of the widow who mourns, decorously, one husband, and is setting the trap for his successor!"

Monsieur de Pennedepie was so pleased with his little witticism, all his bad humor vanished.

It was under cover of the laughter that the Vicomtesse rose. She had accomplished the purpose of her visit. She certainly had no more time to waste, listening to the praises of this second, unknown, possibly, also, over-attractive widow. With her ungloved hand gracefully held out, she smiled amiably through her rouged lips, as she exclaimed:

"Our Honfleur season opens brilliantly! An American—and a beauty—and now this interesting widow, and your charming friend the Baron de Gaspé-Royale as new comers! Who knows what the summer may bring forth?"

She forthwith made her effective exit. The Marquise watched the graceful figure till its outlines were lost in the turn of the allée. Then she remarked, gently, "How pretty she is—still! Yet she must be fifty—at the very least!"

"She is as young and charming as when, as a bride she led the cotillon at our ball, my dear!" gallantly protested the Marquis. For, really, to have taken

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the pains to don one's best light gray tweeds, a purple tie, and one's gayest fancy waistcoat, to impress a woman of fifty! If only in self-defense one should insist on the truth, when it came to the age of a lady who made such artistic efforts to prolong her youth. It was the part of prudence to continue to talk of their coming guest, since she was young enough for her years, not, as yet, to be a matter of heated dispute.

The young Vicomtesse de Grasse was, the Marquis went on to explain, the widow of a year. Her husband, colonel of his regiment, the most noted cavalier of his corps, had been thrown from his mount and had been trampled to death, by his own soldiers, at the manœuvres. They had not seen him fall.

"He left only debts. Hélène has no luck—her parents die, within a year of each other and they also leave only debts."

"She kills off her people, you see. She has the evil eye," wickedly interpolated the Marquis. His wife swept him a scornful glance.

"But meanwhile, she cannot live on air. How does she get on?" I was curious to hear how a well-born French-woman, of this exclusive world, one in which work, of any sort, is a degradation, would manage, on nothing a year. The Marquis was answering me.

"She visits, and," he added, laconically, "she has

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reduced it to a science. One month at one château, where the family is not large, and there are no eligible, unmarried sons—for Hélène is too dangerous—beautiful, and no *dot*,” and, Frenchman that he was, Monsieur de Pennedepie could not keep a certain accent of contempt from tinging his tone. “In some houses, for the sake of her voice—for she sings like a siren—they will keep her for two or three months, to entertain their guests. to get up tableaux, to arrange little comedies. A woman as clever as Hélène is a god-send in a dull neighborhood!”

I found a line of Porto-Riche running in my head.

“Les pauvres sont les chiens des riches.”

To such a level must a clever, beautiful woman sink, in this old world, if fate plays her an unkind trick. The thought flew far a’field, across the green orchards, across the miles of the now lake-like Atlantic, to the land where women, instead of being “the dogs of the rich” could re-make their lives, could prove good the talent that had, hitherto, perhaps, been concealed in the folds of the domestic napkin.

Vaguely, the concluding words of the Marquis sounded in my ear. “She is a wonderful woman!”

There was a moment’s pause. Our ideals of wonderful women were several centuries, and quite three

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thousand miles apart. So I said, not wishing to enter into a fruitless discussion, "And now this remarkable woman is coming to you."

The glow died out on Monsieur de Pennedepie's face. "Yes—and the difficulty will be to get her to depart." He sighed, resignedly.

The ensuing pause was broken by a little cry from the lips of the Marquise. For some minutes, her clever face had been twisted with the earnestness of inward thought. Now, along with her outburst of speech, there was proffered the rare caress. Madame de Pennedepie was about to ask a favor of some sort. Her hand lay affectionately on mine.

"Dear friend, a thought has come to me! If you could, if only you would help us——"

"Help you?" I faintly echoed. The vision of an unknown widow, endowed with irresistible charm, and with a special talent for prolonging, indefinitely, her stay in country houses loomed up, terrifying of aspect.

"You might, if you would, prove to be my poor friend's good angel." The little lady's face was now aflame with enthusiasm. "You see, Hélène must marry and soon. In our world, to find a second *parti* is practically out of the question. Without a *dot*, with no living relations who could be of use—in furthering a second husband's fortunes—with only

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her charm and her beauty, how can the poor child hope to re-marry? But now a really brilliant idea has come to me. You are our friend. You will help us." There was a tightening of the grasp on my limp hand.

My instinct was to protest, and with vehemence. "But, you see I have no brothers and no marriageable, no available sons."

The Marquise broke down my defenses. "But your compatriots—so generous—so rich! And your men are so kind, so noble. They are not interested."

Madame's real meaning was, that our men were not mercenary, at least, she had heard Americans still married for love. It was only American women, she believed, who married for money or for a title.

I found the situation too replete with elements of comedy to resist playing on the theme. Here was a woman I had never seen. For this unknown charmer I was to find a husband. How far would the ridiculous customs of their caste carry these two amiable matchmakers, whose sole conception of marriage was material security—since, in this forlorn Hélène's case, the usual considerations of family and title were out of the question?

I found this situation, I repeat, somewhat replete in elements of comedy. I took an innocent satisfaction in prolonging the obvious delight of my two

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friends in contemplating the possibilities presented by certain portraits drawn of several possible suitors, with superfluous millions.

The gentle Marquis and his match-making lady went home in a flutter of excitement. To the easily touched French imagination, the destiny of their coming guest seemed bright as a shining star—as the star that still shines, for so many, in our western horizon.

Chapter IV

A FRENCH WIDOW

WHEN she finally appeared, the young Vicomtesse de Grasse did not belie the eulogies bestowed upon her. As far as good looks went, she justified her friend's portraiture. In features, figure and bearing she was a fine type of her race and class. Being a widow, young and French, Madame de Grasse used crape with a view to decorative effect. A great deal of white was introduced where an Anglo-Saxon would have considered white as an offense against good taste. Yet, it must be admitted, if all widows mourned their lords in as distractingly becoming costumes as those worn by H  l  ne de Grasse there would be few wives left to weep over fresh graves.

I was to see the lady in any number of attractive poses. At the ch  teau de Pennedepie, she was to be found either sedately bending over the Marquise's embroidery-frame, filling in all the ribbon work with skillful fingers—"H  l  ne can do anything with her fingers," her adoring friend would say;—or she would be seated at the tea-table, the picture of domesticity.

"No one makes tea like H  l  ne," the Marquise

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would nod, with the quick little French bend of the head.

This praise, at least, was due the lady; few Frenchwomen succeeded in turning out as fragrant a beverage as did Madame de Grasse. And she had her countrywoman's grace in proffering the cup and in handing you the minute, sickly-looking pastry puffs the Marquise conceived to be the correct accompaniments for this foreign custom of the "five o'clock."

Madame de Grasse's success was immediate with our little world. To be "*jolie femme*" is usually accomplishment enough, in this country that worships women and beauty. But clever *Hélène* had acquirements that her countrywomen admired. She was the very pattern of conventionality. She was the perfect model turned out by the good Sisters, in a fashionable convent. She talked in the voice trained by aristocratic ladies, who, in giving up the world, continued to cultivate the niceties of etiquette and all the social observances that they might transmit them to their pupils. It is this convent schooling that makes every well-bred Frenchwoman exactly like her sister, originality being a crime. A woman of the world, in France, may do anything—she may even sin—if it be but in good form—and all is forgiven her.

Madame de Grasse talked, (to women, at least) walked, gesticulated, smiled, and dressed as ten thou-

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sand women of her class go through the polite motions of their conventional lives. It was not her fault if she walked with a grace no conventual ladies could teach, or that she looked extraordinarily wide-awake when uttering platitudes.

It is interesting, always, although no novelty, to watch the dynamic effect of a single widow in a quiet neighborhood.

The indolent Vicomte de Castel, to every one's surprise, suddenly developed a passion for tennis. He and Madame de Grasse were soon playing set after set, and day after day. Never had one seen the Vicomte so full of youthful energy, so careful of his toilet, and so assiduous in early arrivals and late departures, at the various "days" in the neighborhood.

"The Vicomte is waking up," the Marquis would say, his lips curved, with a certain relish, as he would follow the astonishing springs of his friend, in mid-air, to catch H  l  ne's swift ball. "Yet, as I know H  l  ne, and well, he will not be rewarded. It is not to have a 'flirt' with Henri she has taken the long journey—yet—who—who can have inspired her? What can have been the motive? I confess it intrigues me."

"She intends to marry your friend the Baron, probably," I wickedly insinuated.

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The Marquis left off watching the players. His eyes changed to gray, a way they had when he was interested. He nodded his head, gravely, as he enunciated slowly, "And I, fool that I am, never to have thought of it!"

"Has she met him?" I asked.

"Met him?" repeated my friend. "As well ask if she has seen the man in the moon, in the flesh. Gaston has shunned us, since she came, as though our house were the centre of contagion."

"And so it is—look—behold how the contagion spreads——"

At that moment, the tennis players, having finished their set, were standing under a tall elm. Hélène was the centre of a circle of all the males present, the Marquis excepted. For a moment only, did this adroit creature accept the adoration of her admirers. She presently broke the circle; she made her way to the seat where the Vicomtesse de Castel was sitting, pouring orangeade into thin glasses.

The Vicomtesse received the approaching group with a different smile for each one. To her husband she lifted a tender look, as her lips parted with a gay smile. "How hot you are! *pauvre ami*—but how well you played, did he not, Madame?"

And to the brilliant-eyed, slightly flushed Hélène, Madame gave her most radiant smile. There was an

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unspoken wealth of meaning in the glance given with the full glass. If ever one woman said to another "My dear, the little game you are playing is one in which I am an adept," the Vicomtesse's expressive eyes delivered that message to the alluring widow.

Adept she may have been, but there were unfathomable depths in Madame de Grasse's clever manœuvres. To others beside the Marquis, it was made plainly evident that not only the adoration of the Vicomte, but that of all her other admirers' attentions were accepted as she received the civilities of the neighborhood. "What charming people! And how kind, how amiable was everyone!" was her ever-recurring refrain. Even the Vicomtesse, in the end, was impressed by this innocent air.

It is certain that at this period, Madame de Grasse's coquettish inclinations were held well in hand. This reader of her world and of its unwritten laws knew that at this critical stage of her career, to be talked about would be a mistake. Later on, the inevitable liaison might be a necessity; at this period, one such attachment would be fatal. For the liaison, whether one be widow or wife is, in reality, a confession of matrimonial failure.

Chapter V

THE HERMIT'S TRICK

A FORTNIGHT passed, and nothing in particular happened. There were more picnics, more breakfasts, some few dinners, at which Madame de Grasse made startling appearances. Her *décolletées* were sensational; her arms and neck were such as Aphrodite showed, when rising from the foam of her ocean bed. Snowy tulle, in this more modern presentment, was made to do effective duty, in lieu of milky waves. Without a jewel, in a simple yet most effective blending of whites and blacks, Hélène de Grasse, in evening dress, was one of the most dazzling visions I have ever seen decorating mahogany.

It was after one such triumphal appearances, that her friend the Marquis took the direction of the Manoir. He had courageously braved a hot sun to confide to me "that a scheme, a great scheme was being concocted. It ought to work—it might indeed prove to be the hoped-for lightning stroke." And the Marquis closed his eyes, as though the better to contemplate the inward picture.

"But this wonderful stroke, whom is it to strike?"

"You will see, in a day or so. You will be the first

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to be told. 'As yet, nothing must be said; my wife wishes the matter kept a profound secret.' Over the still youthful, because still credulous face, there spread a charming expression—the delight in guarding an interesting secret and the boyish joy of having revealed more than he ought.

Several days passed. And still nothing happened.

Then, on a certain cloudy afternoon, when word had been sent from the de Castel household there would be no tennis on that day, I heard the latch of the little green gate lifted.

As the Marquis came forward, I knew the great secret was a secret no longer. His step was light and quick. The eyes, as they met mine, were sparkling with mingled glee and the inward joy of having so much news—and such a rare morsel of news! to communicate. He could not be induced to take a seat. He had only run in, *en passant*, he said; it was the "day at the château de Champsperdue." What he did not avow was that there he would have the larger audience. He had the delicate haste, the sense of agreeable importance of the Parisian who enters one salon to disseminate the gossip he has heard in the one last visited.

A particularly tempting Havana, one purposely chosen with regard to size and flavor, proved the turning point in our favor. Once installed in his

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favorite *chaise-longue*, and I felt every detail of the story would be given.

"You must know," he began at once, "my wife, as I told you, has been hatching a little plot. It was one demanding tact—even ingenuity. You who know Germaine, need not be told how clever, how fertile in resource she is. Well, the scheme involved no less momentous a project than to bring about a meeting between Héléne and the Baron."

"Ah, so your clever Héléne brought it about, after all."

"Héléne! Not at all! It was my wife who——"

"Hem-m!"

"But I tell you Héléne never mentioned the subject, until Germaine proposed her brilliant scheme. How skeptical you are! It was entirely Germaine's idea to bring those two together, to let Gaston—to let that silly recluse see what he was missing, what might be won—for of all women Héléne would make him a wife in a thousand." The pride with which the Marquis announced this conviction, was that of a prime minister pleading the claims of a princess of the blood, to some royal, reluctant suitor.

"Well—and this famous plot?"

The Marquis resumed, with heightened animation: "The plot was of a simplicity! It would have deceived a Talleyrand. Since the Baron would not

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come near us, how was a meeting to be brought about? Germaine devised the one feasible scheme."

A note, an innocent note was written. Would their dear Gaston permit them, his two old friends, to bring their guest and intimate friend, the young Vicomtesse de Grasse to Boisvert, on any convenient afternoon? Knowing Gaston's dislike of ceremonious visits, would he receive her, as he did them? They could take a turn in the beautiful gardens, have a cup of tea on the terrace, and a chat.

"Could any project, I ask you, wear a more innocent face? In order to nail the affair, so to speak, as Gaston is a man of sentiment, we made an appeal to sentiment. My wife deftly added, apart from the pleasure of seeing the historical château and grounds, their guest would find a deeper, a certain melancholy joy in revisiting Boisvert. Years ago, as a child, she had been taken there, on a short stay, with her parents. This was in the time of Gaston's own father. Cleverly concocted, all this—hein?" laughed the Marquis, with immense delight.

"For, of course, there had never been any visit—nor any——"

"Of course not. Although it was quite true that de Gaspé-Royale, the father, and Hélène's father knew each other, and well. 'Another reason why the union would be a fine thing.'"

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The Marquis shook his head. His eyes were running over with mirth. "Ah, sly fox, Gaston! Nothing could be more cordial than his reply. Delighted, he would await our coming with impatience, and would Friday be convenient? He had intended, long since, to pay his respects to our charming friend, and should esteem it an immense favor for her to visit Boisvert. Hum, too many 'greats and immenses' as I told my wife. Gaston is not given to hyperbole. However, the day came, and we drove over."

"Madame de Grasse, I presume, looking like a dream."

The Marquis closed his eyes, in sensuous retrospect. "I never remember to have seen Hélène in such beauty. She appeared to have summoned all her attractions——"

"As a general might cry, on the eve of battle, to his soldiers, 'Conquer or die'!" I interrupted.

My friend laughed outright. "Yes, something like that. But in truth she was superb. *Bien*, we arrived, on the tick of the clock. The great gates were wide open. The concierge magnificent, in the pinks and blues of the de Gaspé-Royale livery. It might have been a truly royal function."

Here a long spiral of smoke was sent up. Now that we were approaching the climax, the effect was not to be spoiled by haste.

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"And the Baron?" I asked, with some impatience. But the Marquis was not to be hurried.

Another long pull. "You are too quick. You have already divined what awaited us. Well, we drove up the long avenue of elms, to the Château. There also, the great doors were wide open. Yet there was no sign of Gaston. All the windows, also, were open, all save one——"

Here the Marquis gave me a significant glance.

"And behind that closed window?"

A beseeching glance met mine; a half nod my only answer. After a certain pause, the recital was continued.

"We were met on the terrace by Gaston's secretary. His own man, Delatour, stood behind. Within the house, all the valets were lined up—all in the livery and powder of ceremonious occasions——"

"A spectacle of splendor hardly calculated to dampen poor Madame de Grasse's ardor——"

"You are cruel!" but the wickedness seemed to be relished for Monsieur de Pennedepie went on with accelerated speed.

"The secretary was, meanwhile, all bows. Delatour was bowing as no servant, of the *repos hepdomadère* era ever bows, now-a-days. They have lost the art. The secretary then made his little speech. He had painful news to announce. His master had been sum-

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moned to Tours, by telegraph, that very morning, on important business. He had had only time to catch the train. As he was to be absent several days, and realizing how much pleasure our guest might lose, in not re-visiting the scenes of her childhood, as well as the great honor we had done him in proposing such a visit, he had left word that the château, the woods, park, and gardens should be at our disposal. As for himself, and his disappointment, he was desolated, simply desolated! the rascal!" exploded the Marquis, half in anger.

Presently his laughter shook him, the ashes falling unheeded from his cigar. He managed to puff out, "What a counter-stroke—hey? what a masterly counter-stroke!"

"For of course there had been no despatch, and all the time, behind that closed window——"

The Marquis threw up his hands, "O you Americans! You are so quick! But yes, you are right. That wicked Gaston had imagined that devilish plan. He would give us everything we asked for, excepting himself. Our pretty widow might indulge in her sentimental reminiscences, and to her tender heart's content. Meanwhile, he would enjoy the scene, from a safe distance."

Here the long-fingered, beautiful hand was laid impressively on mine. "Dear lady, that rascal was

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not only behind that closed window, he was actually looking at us through an opera-glass—Yes—quite as though we were a *corps de ballet*!”

For one whose great scheme had turned out a complete failure, I never saw a man take a joke played against himself with keener relish. “Yes,” he went on, “Behind that half closed blind, that boy was taking us all in. Our look of prepared delight, our dignified approach, our smiles, the gradual freezing, when we learned the trick that had been played on us, and our final stony stare of righteous anger, when we realized our situation. All the while, mind you, he was looking *Hélène* over, with four eyes, as the Turks say. Not a feature of her beauty escaped him, the brigand!”

“And Madame de Grasse, how did she face the situation?”

My friend’s countenance cleared. The laughter made wrinkles encircle the amused eyes. “O *Hélène*, she is a good soldier! She takes the worst with the best. She accepted the secretary’s excuses, with the air of a queen. She then proceeded to play her part out, to a finish. You should have seen her make the tour of the park, have seen her stand beside the Clodions, grow pensive, tender; ‘It was here I was so gay, so happy, I remember—I used to call these statues my dolls, and crown them, and put daisy chains about

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their little necks!’ It was beautiful—such a piece of acting! She might rival Bartet, any day.”

“I agree with you, Madame de Grasse has missed her true vocation and we a great actress,” I said, dryly.

“That is what my wife said. Ah, my poor wife! Her sense of humor is not keen, alas! like that dear Hélène’s. How Hélène laughed when we reached home! It did one good to hear her. But with my wife, it is another affair altogether. I do not know if she will ever forgive Gaston. She is taking it seriously, you see.”

“As well she might. For surely it was a mean trick for a gentleman to play, and on an old friend.”

The Marquis gave the Frenchman’s shrug. “What will you? Gaston is an original, an eccentric. He saw through our little game, and, not wishing to be rude, he opened his house. But, all the same, he did not intend to be caught. Even Hélène saw a certain justice in his point of view, and so she told my wife, before she left.”

The start I gave brought the Marquis also to an upright. Our eyes met. “You did not know? Hélène left us this morning, by the eight o’clock train. What will you? She saw there was nothing to be done here. She could not waste her season. Paris is full now.”

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"And the Vicomte?"

Monsieur de Pennedepie's face clouded. "Henri is a fool. He will not see when his rather superannuated attentions are in bad taste. He was on the train this morning."

"Oh-h!"

"No, it is not as you think. H         was much annoyed. She went into the Dames Seules."

The Marquis showed a virtue-reproving look.

"But one must change, at Lisieux," and I gave a meaning side glance.

The Marquis shook his hands, in mid-air. "You are incorrigible. You never liked her. You are not just"—and here my friend rose—"I must be going. It is getting late. I must see my wife, before Gaston comes over. He sent word he would come for dinner, now we are alone. And, I do not know if my wife will receive him! Will you help me? If you see her, and she speaks of all this, try to soften her, try to make light of Gaston's little joke." The tender eyes grew wistful, and the face looked suddenly old. What husband does not feel the grip of an indefinite fear, when there is a wife's anger to confront?

There was a long pause. Presently the Marquis murmured, as though thinking aloud:

"And now poor Gaston will be lonelier than ever,

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for if my wife is really angry, if she refuses to see the dear boy—”

“Bring him to us, we are quite harmless. At least for the present. There are, alas, no daughters to marry.”

The Marquis pushed forward an immensely amused face. There was a look of mockery in his animated eyes. “Bring him to you, dear friend! I might as well attempt to drag him to the altar as a bridegroom. You——” and both hands were lifted high in air. “Why, dear lady, you are incarnate America! Your very name spells the worst of horrors, to Gaston. A love of society, a passion for displacement, for travel—what frightens you? Above all other terrors, wherever you go, you bring along with you, the whole regiment—*toute la bande!* Gaston in an American milieu! *Oh, non non!*”

I think it was the mockery of the laughter that evoked a certain resentment. “And what do you understand by the whole regiment?”

The gentleman was quick to perceive the change in the tone. He pulled at his moustache ends, as he answered, simply, “All the pretty American girls—all the ladies without their husbands, and all those who openly acknowledge to be divorced.”

My friend, for all his apparent simplicity, was enjoying his moment of attack. He was wondering

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just how much amusement his move would yield. He stood before me, with the look of the mocker.

I proposed to give him a series of electric shocks. "My dear friend," I began, in a voice as bland as possible 'Incarnate America' I may or may not be. But I feel a sudden desire to prophesy. I feel a premonition your eccentric Baron, one day, will take a taste for 'Incarnate America.'" And I lifted what I tried to make an impressive finger—the finger of the prophet. "He will sit there, where you sit. He will stay on and on, long tiresome hours. He will end by being a bore, doubtless, the bore that hangs on when one is trying to pull away."

The Marquis gently shook his head. His smile had a touch of malice mingled with obstinate incredibility.

"Dear lady, the picture you draw may come to be reality, you are such a wonderful people—who knows? 'And you—chère dame, you have your nation's art—you, also, I doubt not, can tame savages. Only, you Americans generally kill off the poor creatures, after domesticating them. Poor Gaston!"

'An indignant shrug was all he had in answer.



Chapter VI

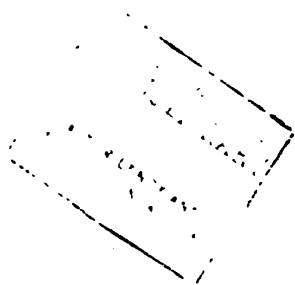
THE LIGHTNING STROKE

THE news from Carola, during these few weeks, had been such as to convey the impression that in perpetual change she had found the true secret of happiness. Never to sleep in the same bed twice; to be convinced that the place in which one chanced to be, however charming, could not be as attractive as the one further on; to crowd into a single week sights, sensations, new scenes and scenery, new towns, old churches that were also new—since they were a novelty—beggars, processions, luncheon at a château, and the next mid-day meal eaten on the grass, in the open field—such were the experiences Carola's feverish telegrams revealed, to prove her zest in pursuing the adventure of the road.

Her telegrams had come, in rapid succession, from the most distant points of Brittany. The fishing fleets at Douarnenez had been glanced at, in an eye-flash because of the "rush to Quimper." The "Pardon" at Auray must have been viewed from the cushions of the car, for the next announcement, a day later, brought the terse announcement "arrive tomorrow *viâ Falaise*."



THE CHÂTEAU DE FALAISE



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During the long hours of an early July day, therefore, we had been on the *qui vive*, listening for the not unmusical chime Ernest was certain to give, as he mounted the low hill below our gate. The golden light had begun to stream along the upper branches of the park trees, when two figures were descried making their leisurely way down the carriage road, to the Manoir. One of the two lifted a hand, at sight of us, to wave it, energetically. And a straw hat was gracefully raised.

"I believe—yes—I am sure—it is Carola, and on foot!"

"And, of course, not alone," dryly interpolated the Châtelain.

The surmise proved correct. As the faces of the approaching couple became more clearly discernible, Carola's blue eyes and the fluffy masses of her blond hair were seen, as usual, to be decoratively framed. From a dark motoring hat there floated lengths of light blue veils. Carola's hands were thrust into the pockets of her business-like dust cloak. Below the latter, the gray traveling skirt was of the right length to permit perfect freedom of motion to the smartly shod feet whose diminutive size proclaimed the nationality of their owner.

The gentlemanly figure beside Carola had a foreign air, yet one strangely familiar.

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"It looks like the Baron—like the hermit!" I gasped, as we hurried forward.

"Already?" was the airy retort. To the Châtelain none of Carola's conquests nor were any of her adventures admittedly surprises.

The first greetings over, having introduced the Baron de Gaspé-Royale, Carola proceeded, as was her habit, to take complete possession of the scene.

Holding me at arms' length, with both her small firm hands in mine, looking me full in the face, with her habitual fixity of glance she went on with her explanation of "this most amusing adventure, that, but for this gentleman, might have been so tragic."

"My dear," she cried solemnly, "would you believe it? My auto is a wreck! We struck a ridiculous toy concern! A donkey-cart, no bigger than a baby-carriage! And Ernest, our poor chauffeur, missed instant annihilation by the fraction of an inch!"

"Did you run down the donkey-cart—or did the donkey-cart annihilate? . . ."

"Run it down?" Carola's lovely blue eyes closed, as over an awful mental picture. I had sufficiently recovered from my own double shock of seeing Carola make her appearance on foot and in the unexpected company of the hermit, to note that the said hermit was not losing this fortuitous revelation of the way Carola's eye-lashes had of curling upwards.

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"Run it down?" she reiterated, finally, opening wide her blue orbs, to plant them full upon the staring, not-in-the-least intimidated Baron. "This gentleman can tell you! He, being the hero of the hour, however, of course, he will not. But for him, that cart, the groom, children and donkey, as well as Miss West, Ernest and I would now be in little pieces, flying about in the air, with shreds of us scattered about the bushes——"

Carola took a second to catch her breath. In her most solemn *staccato* she articulated "He saved our lives!" The look John Marlborough's widow lifted to the now amused, but still admiring eyes of her rescuer would have enticed St. Simon Stylites from his solitude on his column.

For a long instant the Baron held his glance fixed, a fascinated yet scrutinizing glance, on Carola's expressive face; he presently turned, to include us in a survey less interested, but equally investigatory. All the while he was gallantly repudiating the "extravagance of Madame's kind praises," one felt the veiled yet penetrating analysis of the elements composing the foreign group before him. For until a Frenchman can satisfactorily affix his label, can determine exactly in what niche of the human museum a new species belongs, he is not mentally at ease.

The Baron's brow presently cleared. He had found

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our respective pigeon-holes. We were being scientifically catalogued. Yet all the time, during this perplexed moment of receiving new impressions, noting them, and finally classifying them, with the airiest grace in the world, and as though the whole matter before him were merely to diminish Carola's imputation of heroism, the Baron, later on, over the tea-cups, gave us a very succinct and simple account of the accident.

The misadventure was due to the usual and every day occurrence of the stupidity of the driver of the donkey-cart. Unmindful of the warning horn, the obstinate groom had kept to the middle of the road. At the very moment the chauffeur made his curve, to pass to the left, the stupid fellow drove headlong into the car. The Baron, was, it appears, at that very instant passing along the road on his mare. His warning shouts to the mad driver were followed by his desperate plunge to seize the rein. The worst climax of the catastrophe was thus prevented, although the rush of the car against the stone hedge, and the impact of the cart virtually wrecked both vehicles. But no lives, fortunately, had been lost.

"We were shaken, of course, and Miss West thought herself dead," Carola went on, taking up the narrative at this point. "But she came to life when she saw every single article belonging to her pet

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possession—that gold-lined dressing case of hers—you remember—lying on the grass and in the dust of the road. She is still on her knees, with her glasses on—I am quite certain—at this very instant, picking up those scattered treasures. Nothing would induce her to be reasonable.”

Carola’s seriousness vanished in the hearty laughter that bubbled forth. If there was one thing that made Carola more distractingly adorable than any other it was the contagion of her laughter. When Carola laughed, song and laughter seemed one. Her whole frame trembled with joy. The contrast of this complete abandonment to mirth to the solemnity that gave so serious an air to her manner, presented contradictions that appealed to the imagination. Her musical outburst had, apparently, completed the Baron’s capture. For captured he was. He had received, I was convinced, his “lightning stroke.”

He presently made his adieux; but not before having carefully, with a persistence as marked as his courtesy was perfect, forced Carola to fix a meeting for the following day, at the villa she had taken, it appeared, “in passing, at Trouville.”

“I must come, Madame, to make my homage and to inquire about Miss West. I hope my man has already found her. She will be coming presently. I go to meet her,” said the Baron, in his precise Eng-

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lish; and he then made his several ceremonious bows.

“Perfect, isn’t he?” was Carola’s admiring outburst. “How comes it, with such a distinguished neighbor, you have never yet met? A hermit, you say? Nonsense!—he’s a man of the world, to his finger-tips. He is extraordinarily well-informed. He knows a lot. He seems to have made a study of all Normandy. He may be useful,” she added, reflectingly. Her absentminded gaze followed the tall, vigorous shape down the carriage road.

Chapter VII

A SURVIVAL

SOME ten days later, the customary afternoon talk over the tea-cups was going on under the shade of the elms in the allée—the walk Carola said “always reminded her of Versailles.”

Carola's blond aureole was flecked by a stray sunbeam. About her white muslins there fell the enveloping cloud of a gauzy scarf. One of her hands rested on the glass ball of her parasol, while with the other she was lifting a bunch of Caroline Bertot roses to her lips. Her now constant shadow, the Baron, sat beside her. His tall frame was bent over the hand toying with the parasol. On this white surface, his longing eyes were fixed; he had, however, compromised with the proprieties; he was contenting himself with a caressing play of the glossy silken tassel.

Lifting her eyes, Carola caught sight of two advancing figures. She murmured something to the Baron, and both rose. As he sent his eyes forward, at what met his gaze the Baron laughed outright.

“You—here, *mon ami!*” was the Marquis de Pennepie's uncontrollable protest and question in one;

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he had thrown his arms upwards as he spoke, shaking both cane and hands in mid-air. Presently, as he advanced, his eyes widened to their limit; he had recognized in the lady in white, the Madame Marlborough whom he had met on the Pennedepie high-road.

Along with that recognition there came a look of quick intelligence. But this was promptly suppressed. The Frenchman's art of facial control served the Marquis, as he bent over Carola's hand; his face mirrored merely suave surprise and delight.

The Marquise, meanwhile, advanced with a bland, if somewhat pallid smile.

"Dear Baron! What an agreeable and—and unexpected pleasure!" The little Marquise was entirely equal to the great moment. She gave her hand to be respectfully kissed by the Baron—but she focused her penetrating glance on Carola.

"And so—so you have tamed him—our savage—already?" whispered the Marquis, with what was meant for a jocund but which ended in a decidedly reproachful tone. This was after presentations and explanations had been given. The Marquise, meanwhile, had seated herself close to Carola and to the Baron. There would be very little left to tell that astute reader of character and situations, by the time the remaining scones had been devoured.

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My answer to the Marquis was in reality no answer. I lifted an impressive forefinger. It quivered, or should have quivered, in gentle triumph.

"Do you remember my prophecy, *cher ami*? There he is, in that very chair—in which he has sat every day for hours, since he met her. And as I told you, the difficulty is not to induce him to come—but to get him to leave. Pity us! For the Châtelain and I are wrecks. He comes for tea. He stops on for dinner, and would fain be here for breakfast, only my friend remembers the responsibilities of a complexion—and so she retires, occasionally, to Trouville for rest!"

It was thus, amid laughter, that peace was made. The remainder of the afternoon was more or less wasted in trying to make a Frenchman understand what no Frenchman can: that the secret charm in our women lies in just the quality Carola Marlborough possessed; in their innate simplicity, in their genuine honesty, of feeling and purpose, and in their calm acceptance of masculine adoration as their right. The foreign-born man succumbs to this combination of attractions, presenting as it does such novelty in his study of "l'éternel féminin."

Carola's attitude towards her new admirer—her treating Gaston de Gaspé-Royale as she would any other man; her direct, frank, outspoken speech; the novelty of her wit, and the magnetism of her deep

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essential charm had effected in a few days what more elaborate efforts had failed to accomplish. The Baron, being a simple, honest, earnest nature, it appeared, had shunned an artificial life and a world in which neither simplicity nor earnestness were understood. In Carola he had found, perhaps, the long-sought, the one woman in the world for him.

Whatever may have been the private confidences interchanged between the Marquis and his wife, regarding Mrs. Marlborough's easy capture of their friend, their reflections upon his obvious infatuation was one of amused, and rather pleased-than-otherwise, acceptance.

"The dear boy! He has received his lightning stroke, of that I am sure. Did I not tell you it would come, like a bolt out of the blue?" the Marquis gleefully remarked. This was on a subsequent meeting. He became, presently, confidentially biographical concerning the history and true character of Gaston's "rare nature." With the readiness of the Frenchman to jump at the quick conclusion that marriage must follow a strong mutual attraction, the Marquis proceeded to give us, as Carola's nearest friends, an elaborate analysis of his friend's past, of his ancestry, of all he knew of him, personally.

"For you see, we have always known the de Gaspé-

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Royales. His father and I were old friends, even as our fathers and our grandfathers hunted and quarreled, and kissed—for in those days men kissed each other and were not ashamed—even in like manner Gaston and I, though I am so much the elder, have hunted and quarreled—and *ma foi!* I believe I still embrace the boy!”

The Marquis' fine face mounted an ingenuous flush. There was a warmth in his eye and a heartiness in his tone that made one feel quite certain “the boy” was a good deal of a man.

This young Baron, he went on to explain, happened to be an idealist; he was therefore, inevitably bound to confront disillusion and disappointment; being an idealist, even those who thought they knew him best, had in reality, barely seized the true outlines of the young man's interesting personality.

There are certain characters that present themselves as a strong buttress to brace one against a tottering faith in humanity. Such types are rare. They appear to belong rather to some secret sect, than to the mass. They have, as it were, an unwritten code among themselves, such a code as existed, for example, between the Baron and his elderly friend, the Marquis.

They both looked to find in modern French life certain qualities and attractions that no longer exist.

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They were two survivals of their order, of that older generation of noblemen to whom a nice sense of honor, an instinctive chivalry, and the desire of living their lives simply, but with the dignity belonging to their caste, had given to those born in older centuries both distinction and charm.

The Baron's history could be summed up in the pathetic discovery that he did not fit into his own century. There were no more small exclusive circles, in which the refinements of conversations and a delight in mutual tastes formed the link that bound. The Baron had certain serious pursuits, such as a love of archæology, of architectural beauty, of rare bindings and old prints. His friends were all too busy for indulging in intellectual, or in purely artistic pursuits. They would come to him to kill—to shoot or hunt—but yawned when he produced his portfolios, his engravings, or his drawings.

Not only his friends, but Tours itself, in common with its greater rival, Paris, had responded, in disgraceful fashion, to the stir of the modern movement. From the Baron's fastidious outlook, the old town had even leapt towards it, with a certain grossness of gesture. The Châtelains and Châtelaines were aping modern parvenue methods. Display, extravagance, these vulgarities were taking the place of the pleasant old-time intimacies and simplicity.

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It was chiefly these innovations that had driven the Baron north. His own small, fastidiously select hunting-parties were, he found, being more or less abandoned. At the neighboring Châteaux, besides foxes and boars to hunt, there were pretty women to be courted: for those whose debts, or one's mother, were driving them to the covert of matrimony, there were desirable *jeunes filles*. At Louprouge there prevailed the strict monastic rule; not a petticoat was admitted. Louprouge was beginning to share the same fate as the monasteries; empty walls echoed to the rare and ever rarer footfalls.

There was nothing radically wrong with the Château itself. The immensity of sixty bed chambers, suites of salons and halls, guard-rooms and a workable draw-bridge, updrawn every night over a moat still showing clear water—in such a dwelling the owner might be as securely solitary as a trappist.

The night of disgust that darkened Louprouge was clouded by a profounder melancholy. The Baron not only found Tours and its neighborhood intolerable, the twentieth century, his age, in a word, was involved in this quarrel with his birthplace.

Now a man may have caressed the idea that solitude is his ideal state: he may have convinced himself that to live apart from his fellows is no sacrifice, but a coveted privilege. If, however, a breach

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in such a wall be made; if a select few be invited into the sacred enclosure, and no one accepts the condescending invitation, the most stoical hermit may easily turn human. He may confront a surprise. He may find he has feelings, like ordinary men.

The Baron made the unpleasant discovery that, although foxes were plentiful, there were few guests. Louprouge in a word, was become more or less of a desert; it was a place of vast roofed and unroofed acreage over which animals and a hermit might roam at will.

These lurid reflections came to the perturbed mind of the Baron as he faced, one stormy night, the huge fire logs burning away in the cavernous Henri II chimney of Louprouge. Henri II himself had sat in that very corner. The chimney had been built to commemorate the fact that the king had found the older Norman one smoky. He had coughed, it was chronicled, most of the night. The de Gaspé-Royale children were brought up to consider this edifying incident as one of their most cherished ancestral possessions. Some of the weak-minded had heard the king coughing two hundred years after.

The present Baron was no weakling. He was only lonely, and bored. Being lonely, he accused his age of over-gregariousness. Bored, he felt it righteous to be in a rage because others amused themselves.

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One of the logs before him suddenly dropped. A great flame burst upward. The brilliancy of the blue and crimson lights started increased mental activity. Why should Normandy and Boisvert leap out, like living pictures, from the flames?

Normandy! By all the powers, it should be Normandy! The Normans were, it was quickly summarized, inhospitable as a race. So much the better! Boisvert, he also remembered, was some distance from the coast. Ah—it was along the coast-road, the hated automobiles flashed. The fields were, however, vast about the old Château. If one had meadows enough, he reasoned, they were quite as good as walls.

To Boisvert, therefore, he would go. His superintendent should be given instructions no later than the morrow.

On that memorable decision, one on which the Baron was wont to dwell, later, with amused indulgence, hung not alone the fate of Gaston Henri Duchesne de Provence Carloman de Gaspé-Royale, but, eventually, the future of his race.

Chapter VIII

FESTIVAL DAYS

THE persistency with which the Baron de Gaspé-Royale pursued his courtship of our American widow was proved by the ingenuity of his devices for keeping her, not only perpetually interested and amused, but as often as possible immediately beside him. Neither the piazzas of the tiny villa at Trouville, nor even the walks and allées of the Manoir park seemed to satisfy this lover of the open road—of the open skies.

“Why spend one’s days always looking at the same outlook? The peculiar beauty of this wonderful corner of Normandy is, that there are so many perfect little towns, delightful views, and rare churches to tempt one abroad.” This our friend would give as a reason for suggesting, each day, a new programme. But, whatever the plan, the project could ultimately only be accomplished in more or less extensive automobile rides. Now every one knows, that to an adventurous spirit, the front seat of a car, when the owner of the same drives his own machine, is the one that yields the breeze of quickened sensation. And beside her admirer, day after day, was Carola to be

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found, ostensibly investigating the region, but also in reality making a prolonged study of her companion.

I have always thought this mutual passion for change of scene, this common need for constantly whipping the imagination into renewed activity by the seeking of new, romantic sites was one of the first, as it was later, one of the strongest links that drew these two together.

"You see—he is unlike the other Frenchmen I have met," was one of Carola's naïve admissions, in the beginning of this intimacy. "He likes the same things. He sees them so much better, though, than I do," was her genial confession.

"He is clever—I'll grant you that——"

"Oh-h, clever! He's more than that—he just misses being a man of talent—of great talent!" was Carola's indignant protest.

"Why not call him a genius? I see you struggling to withhold the word."

"You are absurd, you know. I will go as far as to admit he is intellectual, and even brilliant, at times. But genius!—that is a big word." She took time to twist a curl that hung over-low on her forehead, before she added, "However, had he been given the advantages of our 'American men, or those well-born Englishmen have, with their government offering all

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sorts of prizes—there is no telling how far he might not have gone.”

“Of course not.”

Carola took the light taunt with a protesting toss of her head. There was a longer pause than usual. And then she said, with an air of remembering, “Really, I didn’t come over from Trouville to discuss the Baron’s abilities. I came for something much more important. He wrote yesterday, and then he came later, to know if we would go to Port-en-Bessin, to see a wonderful fête——”

“The Bénédiction-en-Mer?”

“Yes, it sounded like that. Any way, be good, and come. It promises to be delightful.”

“Long ago, last summer, my friend the curé of Port-en-Bessin, begged me to attend his fête.” And I, who had given my promise, and had forgotten it!

Carola clapped her hands. She had engaging childish ways with her; and she wore a child-like look as she presented her cheek for a conciliatory kiss. Whirling about the room, searching for veils and gloves, she cried, gleefully, “I do love a festivity—don’t you? where *are* my things?”

As we were tying ourselves up in our veils, Carola murmured, “There is one thing, however, that proves his fastidiousness—or his provincialism——”

I managed to answer, seriously enough, “It isn’t

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provincialism, whatever it is. It is his belief in the corner-stone of his order——”

“You are becoming profound.”

“Not at all. Every Frenchman, well-born and with the right ideas, is on his knees to conventionality, where women are concerned, provided——” But I was not permitted to end my sentence.

“Is that the reason the Baron always insists on a chaperon?”

“Of course it is.”

“One would think he was afraid to be left alone with me—lest I might propose!” was Carola’s racy rejoinder, as she gave a final tight twist to her hat.

“He doesn’t intend, you see, to give the gossips a chance to find a flaw in the conduct of the future Baronne de Gaspé-Royale!” And I looked at her with the look of the mentor.

Although she flushed enough to show the dart had pricked, with her most innocent air, she said, “You are again rather absurd, you know. Really, if one can’t have an agreeable man talk to one, in the presence of a whole family, without annoying remarks being made——” and she pouted her displeasure.

“A Frenchman never goes out of his way to pay even a pretty woman marked attentions, unless he has something to gain by the move,” I said, in my

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most severe manner. "I, for one, shall refuse to encourage him—for that is what my presence, according to French social codes, now admits I am doing."

This time Carola was really angry. "And why, I should like to know, should we Americans live up to any French social codes of conduct? It amuses me to listen to a clever Frenchman's entertaining conversation. I am here, in France, to amuse myself. And," she added, loftily, "if you feel yourself compromised, by our innocent intercourse, there is always Miss West, in reserve." That alternative, as she well knew, would be the last to which I should resort.

With the appearance of the Baron, Carola's enthusiasm returned to her. All irritation vanished at the sight of her admirer. She showed him her most riant face.

When Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale announced that we must be starting almost on the instant, that we must, indeed, fly across country, to make Bayeux before noon, Carola clapped her hands, as she sang out, softly,

"'On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flying fishes play!'

"Let us, indeed, fly—let us make a day of it! never

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was there such a sky—nor so much gold in the air.” Who could have believed this was the same woman who, only a moment before, was wearing an ugly frown, and was even disposed to quarrel with her friend, denying the very attitude she now assumed so openly?

That she did not intend to forego a single caprice, nor lower her flag of defiance to a single foreign gossip, was proved by her quick leaping into the front seat of the car. Did she catch the sudden flame that crimsoned the Baron’s cheek, as he helped her to her place? Did she note his brightened eyes, his tender look, as he bent down, before he turned the steering wheel, to say “Are you all right? Is the rug tight enough, on the other side?” Commonplace as were the words, the tone was that of a declaration. Carola’s face, of course, I could not see. There were soon, however, gay duets of laughter; and I on my seat, alone—for the chauffeur was a mute who spoke only through his horn—I had care and perplexity, as my companions.

In spite of her pretense of anger, did Carola not see clearly the shadow—and a very strongly outlined shadow—of coming events in the direction she was allowing herself to be led? Did she delude herself, for a single instant, as to the true meaning of her admirer’s attentions? Did not as clever a woman

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of the world realize the goal her latest suitor had set before him, the prize he so clearly meant to win or to lose? The Baron was not the usual fortune-seeker, nor did he belong to the class of titled foreigners who seek in an American marriage a social rehabilitation. Here was a Frenchman, who had far more to offer a bride, even though she were an American heiress, than she could bring to him, from the point of view of merely worldly advantages. The transformation, therefore, wrought in the Baron's attitude and manner of life, could be attributed to but one miraculous source—to those deep waters Carola's charm had troubled how many a time! and for how many a bewitched adorer!

However open and straightforward the Baron's bearing, in showing by every means in his power, the sincerity and depth of the feeling roused by the beauty and the magnetic quality of Carola's nature and temperament, Carola herself was obviously attempting to carry the whole thing off with an air at once candidly joyous and one also, singularly freed from coquetry. This latter sign I found betrayingly significant. But then—who could predicate anything concerning Carola Marlborough? To warn, would be, as I had found, only to invite derision; to plead would be to be told one was over-officious; to try to prevent any impending event,



A GARDEN ON THE SEINE NEAR HONFLEUR

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would end by precipitating a climax. With a woman like Carola there was one, and only one safe road to follow; she must be free to meet her fate—to learn the hard lesson such freedom so often induces.

It was in the company of such troublesome thoughts I was whirled down to Honfleur.

Gradually, however, the old Normandy magic worked its charm. The spreading seas; the overhanging cliff of the Côte-de-Grâce; wooded dells that were lighted—were gold-dusted—just such a light as Rosalind must have seen, as she danced from tree to tree, in the enchanted forest of Arden; and, presently, the gardens and villas that neighbor Honfleur; each and every one of these familiar aspects of beauty wrought upon the mind their wonted spell. The demon of worry had fled.

As we turned to run into the steep rue des Capucins, the Baron sang out, across his shoulder, and here he kept his car close to the tiny curb of the tiny side-walk, “No use, Madame, to talk Honfleur to you——”

Both of the happy glistening faces were turned towards me; and the words rang out, with gleeful gayety. “No,” I replied, “after five years’ acquaintance with the little town’s smelly streets, with its compressed picturesqueness, and a daily watching of

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its light to substitute ugliness for the old, rare beauty——”

“All the same,” broke in the Baron, “there is still something quite remarkable about it. There are days when I find along the quais, and the beach a tone, a color, I have never seen elsewhere.”

“I know—that mouse color on the *vase*—on the mud-flats! And when the fleet comes in, at low tide, rounding the quais, their sails hanging loose against a pale sky——”

“Exactly,” and the Baron slowed down to a creeping point as his voice rose, in the warmth of his enthusiasm. “Then that fringe of piratical looking sailors and fishermen, always lounging on the stone parapets as though time were made for peasants. How they despise the peasants! Ah-h, that reminds me—I heard a delightful thing yesterday.”

The delightful thing our agreeable host had heard was told, as we were presently walking along towards the church, for we were now in front of Sainte Catherine. Although there were some sixty miles to be made before the noon breakfast, our friend was in no haste to rush us onward. He stood quite still in the market-square; he had an air of inviting time, —as did his friends the fishermen—to stop awhile, since the sun was bright, the company agreeable, and

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there was a story to be told. Something of the Latin heritage of a delicate joy in a delectable moment was perceptible in the dancing eyes, in the flushed yet suave countenance, and in the grace of unhurried gesture.

"You must know, *chères dames*," he began, and he moved onward in front of the beautiful browns of the wooden belfry, against which his own richly colored skin and eyes came out with peculiar effect, "that no later than yesterday, as I was returning from Trouville,"—his eyes told Carola the memories he was carrying back with him—"I sent the car on, to get my constitutional. 'As I passed a certain field, I heard a great braying. 'A donkey was in trouble. His voice was hoarse with pain. I found the poor thing all twisted up in the rope with which he had been tethered. He and I both worked with that rope for a good quarter of an hour. Finally I saw a man, a sailor or fisherman, apparently, coming out of the farmhouse. '*Hola! mon ami!* Your friend here—and I also—*ma foi!* we are in trouble!' The man rolled down to see if this were true. He was a big man. He never moved a muscle of his large face as he looked at us. Yet the donkey and I were still at it.

"Then, my anger rose. I am not a very patient person,"—again his eyes told Carola that there

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were those who would never be troubled with this petty infirmity of temper. "And so," he went on, "I howled, as I threw the knotted rope to the ground, 'Well, Monsieur—(they are all Messieurs, now)—if you take it so easily, let your beast strangle, if you see fit.'"

"'A moi-ca? Ce n'est pas à moi! Moi, j'appartiens à la mer!' And he walked off, digging his hands deeper than ever into his sailor's pockets.

"I found him superb! 'J'appartiens à la mer!' He and the sea!—the sea that owned him! It was the most contemptuous repudiation of our poor earth I ever heard."

The Baron had worked himself up into quite an oratorical attitude. In the market square, in Honfleur, a gentleman orator is not without immediate recognition. Two Villerville fishermen, with their seine nets over their shoulders, presently laughed immoderately at gentlefolks finding amusement in a sensible remark. They had stopped to listen, in company with a half dozen barefooted youthful loafers, a vendor of vegetables, and a group of peasants.

"As if we didn't all belong to the sea!" scoffed the seine net carriers; and they shuffled down to the quais in a hurry. Here was another proof of the stupidity of *ces gaillards*, who found something to laugh at in a truth as patent as the sun's shining.

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The audience, meanwhile, had increased. The Baron turned his back on his admirers; he was now pointing out the interesting Renaissance door and window, in the Belfry, to his companions; but so enamored had his followers become, they hung about him. With a sudden fierce gesture he swung on his heel. "Allons, mes amis—can't you let a man alone?" And he bought his freedom with a handful of coppers.

"Rigolo, celui-la!" piped a cherub of four, trotting down to the nearest candy-shop.

"Come, let us go into the church," cried the successful orator. "At least there we can hope to be freed from this vermin."

The double aisles of the singular edifice evoked the usual surprised comment. This curious XVth century wooden church, with its cradled roof, recalls the hallowed cavity of a ship, we said. And we noted the graceful touches of the Renaissance art still left. Below the organ loft of Sainte Catherine, fauns tripped gaily between gods and goddesses, their pagan levity striking an interesting, rather than a discordant note, in among the sculptured figures of Saints. The bright Normandy sunshine touched fauns' hoofs and ascetic-featured saints with the same faint, subdued light.

The light seemed doubly bright as we made our

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way downward, from the steep steps at the right of the church, to the street that ends in the quais and shipping. "Look at the gate!—how grave and solemn it looks, above the sails and shipping! What a world of life, of adventure, the Virgin in her shrine has looked down upon!" cried the Baron, as he led us rapidly onward.

The Virgin, shrined above the arched "Porte," wore her crown of faded roses, as Honfleur itself wears its dulled aureole of a glorious past.

Yet, as we turned to look beyond the gateway at the tall-storied houses, still grouped close and tight about the inner, older basin, houses that had hugged each other to the stifling point, in the former wall-enclosed town, and saw them suffused with splashes of gold, Rembrandt-toned, Honfleur, I thought, told the story of its wars and long sieges; its struggle with its English foe; its religious conflicts; its lost, but once stirring, spirit of adventure; its mediæval glory as the northern port of France; its long, slow death to this its humble place as an all but forgotten Norman seaport—each one of those crazy, staggering houses seemed to reel forth, much as an old man will sometimes totter from a group, to tell a tale of olden days, in a cracked voice, with shaking finger. We said all this and more.

Then, presently, the Baron and Carola moved



SOME OLD HONFLEURAIS HOUSES

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away into the Museum, to see a collection of old Normandy laces. There was a moment, therefore, when, for the hundredth time since I had known, and had grown to love the old town, when I could summon up its ghosts—those giant figures that crowded its great past.

What an historical page, indeed, is that of Honfleur! From its harbor had not Champlain sailed forth to add a "New France" in what is now known as Canada, to the realm of his king? And not once but twenty times had his ship cast anchor here, in these Honfleurais crowded docks.

In the old basin yonder, planned by Duquesne, under Louis XIV, gaily painted merchant vessels from India, from China brought oriental stuffs and silks and curios to adorn the great houses and Châteaux. And some fragments of these you may still find carefully preserved in the fine specimens of the XVIIth and XVIIIth century cabinets, in Honfleurais dwellings.

My reflections were brought to a sudden stop, for Carola and Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale now joined me; and we walked on towards the church of Saint Léonard. "This one, Madame, you really must see!" was the Baron's insistent urging.

When we finally stood before the sacred edifice it

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was not the finely carved flamboyant portal that aroused Carola's admiration; the wooden statue of Saint Léonard, in his painted robes was "a saint I should like to steal first, and then carry off!—he would look so beautiful, staring out of his blue Norman eyes, at the bluer Atlantic, on my lawn at Beverly!" was Carola's audacious remark. She watched the effect of her irreverent gayety, as she looked over the Baron's amused, but not-in-the-least shocked countenance.

"Dear Lady ! America's lawns and her drawing-rooms must be peopled with Saints. I know a man in Paris who manufactures several thousands of genuine saints—warranted to be centuries old—he can not make them fast enough!" scoffed the Frenchman, jaying in the Frenchman's delight at easily-duped America.

Carola looked at her friend with pitying eyes. "You poor man! You too, are caressing that venerable illusion! My only answer is, come to America, and see for yourself how many frauds we buy!" She lightly laughed her gay scorn.

"That is what I most earnestly desire—to go to 'America,'" the Baron was quick to answer. But his tone was too serious; for Carola frowned; and she hailed the advancing car with an imperious "Really,

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you know, we must be getting on. Already a violent appetite is ringing the breakfast bell! How far off is Bayeux?"

The Baron was careful not to hear; he was too busy turning the starting crank. He had made a *faux pas*; and, man-like, punished the woman for his own mistake.

Carola, in her turn, punished her friend by choosing to sit beside me, on the back seat. This change was obviously one of the reasons why we were rushed up the long hill that led to the Pont l'Evêque road at a pace that might lead to sudden death, but certainly not to glory. The great trees above our heads were merely a wall of green. The valley below, with its farms and fields, was a hollow, with toy villages scattered in among mounds of verdure. The peasants we passed were mere outlines in motion.

"We shall be at Bayeux in no time," Carola said, with a roguish twinkle. "I made a cleverer move than I knew—had I been on the front seat, there's no telling when we should have had breakfast."

"As we have still sixty-odd kilomètres to make——"

"Sixty? Why didn't you tell me?" cried Carola with such a ring of distress in her tone, I laughed outright.

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"Isn't there any other town where we can have a meal?" she added, her young appetite urging its claim.

"The Baron, I understand, has already telegraphed for breakfast, at Bayeux. It is to be served the instant we arrive."

Carola settled herself back in her seat with an air of resignation. "I must feast on views, then," she murmured, in grumbling tones.

She forgot her hunger when we entered Pont l'Evêque.

Never had I seen the old town as fitly decked and costumed. It had recaptured much of its lost grace, of the spectacular color of its pageants of long ago. The town was gayly decorated; streamers and banners were floating aloft between the houses; upon the ill-laid paved streets was patterned a mosaic of ferns, palm-leaves, rose-petals and geraniums, on which the procession was to tread. Pont l'Evêque had indeed surpassed itself. For years it had not shown as devout, as reverentially pious a front. From end to end of the crooked, twisting streets, houses and shops had been hung with linen; on these white surfaces nose-gays had been pinned.

The long procession of the Fête-Dieu, going from one Reposeoir to another, was to pass between these draped walls. The town seemed a never-ending



A LACE-MAKER—CAEN

7

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altar. The perfume of incense and crushed flowers would linger on for days in the balmy July air.

The Baron put on speed, as soon as we reached the level road that led to Caen. The rush of the now warm noon air was almost cold, so swift was our pace. The landscape was a blur. A cluster of thicker farms and thatched houses was Dozulé; further on, a dense mass of green foliage, beneath which a village seemed buried, proved to be Troan. The great stretches of the Caen plains, over whose vast carpet groups of cattle, the turret of an inland château, bunches of trees and flocks of sheep were objects that flashed into view only to be as speedily lost, presently melted into the trimmed hedges of the park lands, above which uprose the spires of Caen against the vaporous sky.

The short seventeen kilomètres between Caen and Bayeux were made in an incredibly brief spurt. The giant mass of Bayeux's Cathedral was striking its impressive attitude in among the city's antique-featured streets, while still, before our blurred vision, the roofs of brown thatched farm-houses and the green sea of Caen's plain were moving, with cinametograph rapidity, before our eyes. We were brought, with skilled precision, before the door of Bayeux's best inn.

We were led to a tiny garden; a square of box

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grew beneath an uprising growth of tall shrubs. In the middle of this verdant square, our table was set. Though no flowers were decorating the white cloth, there were standard roses, odorous lilies, and multi-colored poppies so close to our seats we feared to move lest, inadvertently, a lovely head should fall.

Within the little hotel, whose walls rose up to make a grateful shade, less romantic breakfasters were busily engaged in the eating of a meal still considered, in the provinces, as the one to be taken the most seriously of all three.

"Think of being imprisoned in there—in that stuffy interior—when one can be out here, with all this beauty about one!" was Carola's cry, as we spread our napkins. The Baron and I agreed that the soul that could make such a choice must be dead indeed to the poetry of existence. And we promptly sipped our Grâves Supérieure with a conscious sense of increased self-approval.

The light rained down, as though to anticipate the coming benediction; and the gayety of our spirits, already set to a lively key, by the discovery of this paradise of a little garden, was not suffered to drop to dull normal measure, by Carola's insistent buoyancy. Never had I seen her in such an abandonment of mirth; joy suffused her eyes as the light poured out of the overfull skies. Was the

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Normandy sunshine alone responsible for her exuberant gayety? In such an air, indeed, who could have had the heart to prophesy disillusion—or the dismal shadow of possible parting? Whose ear was fine enough to hear the fateful raven's croaking of "Nevermore"?

Certainly not Carola, whose brow was aureoled with a Bacchante-like joy—with that Greek delight in life we Americans temper with a dash of Puritan self-restraint. And equally certain it was not the Baron de Gaspé-Royale, who was in that condition of beatitude which engenders a belief in the continuity, in the immortal progression of happiness, rather than in its fleeting character.

The scene in the little garden lent itself to a delectable faith in the durability of all things pleasant—to the reasonableness of being in love with life; to the dearer persuasion that to be in love was the one supreme necessity, the only law of being. As the little feast proceeded, Carola's high spirits rose in proportion as the Baron's eyes and accent became more and unmistakably betraying. A hundred times did he lay aside his knife and fork to gaze and gaze. And of such glances, Carola would have none. She proceeded to play the comic rôle; she had a thousand child-like graces and fancies. Now she was pelting us with a handful of rose-petals; or she was

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weaving a wreath, one she presently set upon the astonished Baron's bare head, "to make you look Roman,—for isn't this a Roman feast? Didn't those wonderful people, Horace and Maecenas, and the others, always eat in the open air, when they were at their villas?"

Or she would break forth with "Now I am going to sing—you didn't know I sang? How little you know of my real talents! Of course I shall sing! Who ever heard of a feast without music—one set forth with roses and lilies, and in a French garden at that,—shades of Mürger! some one must make a noise!" And with that, she actually cleared her throat, leant back against the bushes, lifted her glass, as she trilled out the opening bars of Elgar's "Salut d'Amour."

Although her voice was neither Melba's nor even a nightingale's, its sweet vibratory timbre produced an unlooked-for effect. Our waiter suddenly appeared from behind a thicket; he held a smoking dish which he allowed to cool, in the heat of his amazement. He stood gaping and immobile, with both hands extended, with a face almost as crimson as was the lobster à l'Americaine. Two of the *pensionnaires*, flourishing napkins torn hastily from their collars, filled the open doorway. The proprietor of the hotel had flung himself from his raised

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desk, where he had been industriously counting heads; he came to crane his head above the *pensionnaires*, as he murmured to his nearest lodger:

“Que diable chante-t-elle?”

“Whatever it is, she’s singing it well, quoi qu’elle n’a qu’une toute petite voix.”

“When a woman is as pretty as that, no one knows whether she has a voice or not.” Then the trio kept silence, as Carola’s swelling notes filled the air.

On the Baron’s mobile, sensitive face there was mirrored so delicate, so intimate a delight, that Carola, when she finally brought her eyes away from the roses to which she seemed to have addressed her song, to fix them on her lover’s moved countenance, stopped short.

“Oh—finish it—please!” The Baron’s hand swept impulsively across the table; for a second of pleading, it rested upon Carola’s bare wrist.

But the song was ended. Carola shook her head; she had caught sight of the audience in the doorway.

“Too many listeners! Too bad! I had meant to have a grand finale. Isn’t it the classical thing to dance a *pas de seul* on the table?”

“Quelle charmante enfant!” murmured the Baron, with the lover’s look of adoration in his eyes.

The child in Carola had indeed been given a

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holiday. She had let herself go; she had clasped hands with an innocent, an irresponsible joy; the lyric of pure felicity burst from her lips as a bird sings for the mere pleasure of singing.

The Baron had been captured by the prism-like play of her many contrasting qualities, he was tenfold the lover of this effervescent *joie de vivre*.

"She sparkles with mirth as a child at play—and yet there is an innocence in her gayety—there is the joy of something we have lost! She has recaptured the old eighteenth-century sensibility—our own dead *gaieté de cœur* re-lives in her!"

Carola raised her hands, in the pretense of polite astonishment. "And these are the vaunted perfect French manners, manners we are taught to revere! to talk about people before their faces—to criticise——!"

The Baron seized her upraised hand. He held it a second before he swept his kiss upon the white surface. "You are adorable! You are——"

But Carola rose with precipitate haste; with an alarmed expression, one she quickly hid under the playful protest, she said, "Really, you know, the sun is too hot out here! And ought we not to be going on?"

The Baron had already risen. He took the note of her reproof with remarkable meekness. Signal-

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ing to a waiter, he ordered the car to be brought around. In less time than seemed credible, our *parti carré* was out upon the road. Again I had the silent Ernest as my companion. Carola, with no pretense of subterfuge this time, had sprung to take the front seat, beside the Baron. The sound of their voices, the ring of their happy laughter was proof, if proof were needed, that for them the festival note had already begun.

Chapter IX

A BÉNÉDICTION-EN-MER

ALL Bayeux seemed to be moving downward toward the sea. There were long lines of peasants, of shop-keepers and their wives and families, of artists with their white umbrellas and paint-boxes, some on foot and others in *char-à-bancs*. The six miles of the highroad were as full of merry-makers as though this ceremony of the blessing of the sea were some mediæval miracle play. The coarse, strong Normandy voices filled the air; the laughter was riotous; already, at the noon meal, the heady Norman cider had begun its insidious effects—a slow intoxication hastened by the more rapidly working old Calvados. Even the old were taking prancing steps.

It was impossible not to feel the contagion of this festival spirit. The gallic delight in a fête was visible in every brightened eye, in the gay shouts, in the sportive gestures, in the songs that rang up; some of these were over-free—or it would not have been France and Normandy.

The short six miles were quickly made; we were soon in the midst of a crowd massed on the hilltop on which stands the parish church of Port-en-Bessin.

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The Baron helped us to alight, his eyes, meanwhile, busily searching for our friend the curé.

"There he is!—Ah! le brave homme!" cried the Baron, a ring of excitement in his tone. For him, too, the festival bell had rung. He led us forward. But the group of townsfolk, of fishermen, of peasants, was hard to move. Finally the curé's eager, animated face was pushed above the crowd.

"Ah! mon ami!" rang up, and there was a quick parting of the mass of parishioners and fisher-folk. The curé gave us gleeful welcome, with the cordial French acclamations—"How good of you to come! How kind of you!" And all the time his eyes were on Carola, to whom he had swept a low salute and a still lower one when the presentation was made. He and the Baron then held hurried consultations; the curé was asking anxious questions—had we seen the Cadets de Neustrie on the road? The whole procession had been kept waiting; this the Bishop's own guard had not yet made their appearance. Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale was ready to take the car back to Bayeux, on a spin of investigation—or should he send the chauffeur, or——?

"Ah! there is Monseigneur!" exclaimed the poor curé, in the panic common to all managers of festivities when things go wrong. And he sped away, beckoning us to follow.

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Forth from the presbytery, and down through the modest garden paths, with imposing pomp, there swept the ecclesiastical group. The Archbishop, supported by his canons, followed by a long train of priests, passed to the garden gate. For a single instant the Bishop stood irresolute. He and the curé held a whispered conference. With a charming smile, Monseigneur presently laid his hand, on which glistened the great amethyst, on the agitated shoulder before him. There was a great stillness, as the words came:

"The mothers, my son, will not be sorry at this little accident—see—they with their babes are waiting for the blessing!" The Bishop, in his deep voice, thus soothed his distracted priest. With a gentle gesture, he moved through the open gate, swung into rhythmic step, his purple robes swaying as he walked. He came to a rest in the very middle of the broad street. His bishop's staff, golden, starred with jewels, the tall episcopal mitre, the costly laces of his tunic, and his cloth of gold cope invested the tall shape and powerful face of this Bishop of Bayeux with a splendor that is dimmed in cathedral aisles. The sun lent to the scene and surroundings, as well as to this glowing central figure, a novel, a wondrous lighting. One thought of certain early Italian processions, that

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are brilliant still, on canvases that make lines of light in dark galleries.

Meanwhile, there was a great crowding and pushing. The mothers, with their babes clutched close, were pressing forward. "Doucement! Doucement! mes enfants," were the warning murmurs from the lips of the attendant priests. Over the sleeping faces of the unconscious babes, as over the foreheads of older children, the sign of the cross was made, again and again, and yet again.

Beyond this touching scene, confusion reigned. Our friend the curé was rushing to the open road, to scan the dust-colored horizon. Where were the Cadets de Neustrie? Where were the veiled Virgins, the First Communicants, those that were to come from Bayeux, to take part in the ceremony? Where was the military band, with the big drum and the ringing trumpets? One heard orders and counter-orders shouted down the road. The curé's fluted white surplice was filled with wind—was balloon-shaped as he ran from the open fields to the incoming tram-cars.

About the Archbishop, for a single moment, there was an empty space. "Come! I must present you!" cried the Baron in an authoritative voice. And he led us forward. When Carola bent to kiss the ring, the free hand was lifted, to make the sign of the

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cross, and a second later his Grace was asking "If this dear daughter were not from America?" There was time only for a hurried reply, for already the news had spread that "*Les Cadets sont là!*"

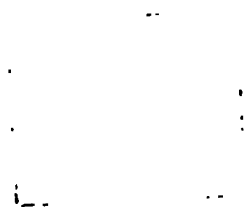
One heard, from a distance, the agonized shouts of the officers of the Cadets,—genial green grocers, in private life; there came the stirring of hundreds of young feet, forming into line; and the energetic figure of the curé was preceding the now hastily formed squadron of the Bishop's guard. But there was still the band—where in the name of all that was responsible were the musicians?

Up on the hilltop, meanwhile, pomp and state had been abandoned. His Grace joined in the light laughter that rang up from the respectful crowd. He had unbent, to take a natural pose; he even let his staff sag—a sure sign that he was, while waiting, humanly approachable. There was a great buzzing; there were staring eyes close to the great presence; and some, more venturesome than others, bent down timidly to kiss the ring.

A group of choristers, in their lace surplices and scarlet robes, leant against the green hedges; certain of the banner-holders, those who had been holding up their heavy loads, now confessed their burden too much for them; the satin-embroidered saints and the Virgin were propped against the nearest trees.



CHURCH AT PONT L'EVÊQUE



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It was perhaps the most interesting moment of the procession. This grouping of high ecclesiastics, of fisher-folk, of peasants in holiday attire—babies, *gamins*, priests—all these actors and spectators, professional and lay, were fused and grouped as though a play rather than a sacred ceremony was in process of formation.

At last the great moment came. The Bishop stood once more, imposingly erect. His canons formed about him. There came the trampling of many feet, and the Bishop had, at last, his guard of honor about him. Les Cadets de Neustrie were bright-eyed young lads, who swung into military step with an air of importance.

There followed long lines of the veiled First Communicants; there were choristers who sang, in unison, when the drum and trumpets of the provincial band were not playing an astonishingly lively march for a pious occasion; the groups of fishermen made picturesque notes of color, in among the scarlet tints, the white veils, and the blue blouses of the peasant farmers.

Downwards the interminable procession wended its way. The fresh breezes from the open sea swept upwards to meet those who were coming to bless it.

On the quais we found a waiting multitude.

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The Baron kept urging us to move on, as rapidly as possible, to the outer curve of the stone arms that encircled the vast basin.

“From that point, we can see the entrance into the boats,—and we can watch the whole movement, as they pass out to sea.”

On and on we hastened. Though the space on top of the quais was broad, every inch was already covered. In the pushing and elbowing of the crowd, I lost my companions. Or had they, perhaps, purposely lost me? In any case, I found myself far out, at the very edge of the stone pier that abutted into the open sea. The scene was one never to be forgotten—one strangely pagan—one that evoked memories of ancient rites, of antique ceremonials, of anything and everything ancient and Greek rather than a spectacle born of modern faith.

In the huge harbor, a fairy fleet had floated out upon the waters. Fishermen's boats were roped together with long garlands of flowers. Festoons of lilies, of scarlet geraniums, of corn flowers, hung along the sides of the ships. Each mast was wound about with green boughs, to which roses and carnations had been pinned. The boats were gardens afloat. For a few moments the ships had been drawn close to the steps leading from the quais to the water. Into the first of the boats the Bishop

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stepped. He caught up his robes with a woman's dexterity. He trod the little deck of the fisherman's craft with sure footing.

"Il a le vrai pied d'un marin—celui-là!" said a fisherman close to my elbow. He was letting his feet dangle as he sat at his ease on the stone parapet.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked, in a querulous tone, a hook-nosed sailor, who stood above the spreader of nets. "One doesn't forget one's calling, even if one does rise to wear the mitre."

"He's a good one—he is. No frills—he talks about going to sea in his father's boat—still—one sees he's the son of his father." And the two settled down to watching the fleet put out to sea.

The slowly moving boats, roped with their roses and greens, drifted out into the wide harbor. A light breeze had sprung up. With it a delicate haze veiled the sea and the long line of the towering cliffs, that were gray-green above, and softened amber as they met the sea. The ever-strengthening wind lifted the swinging garlands, moved, as with a human touch, the fluted surplices of the choristers, and filled the hanging sails of the fishermen's crafts—that were anchored in the basin—puffing the brown and carmine canvases as though purposely to lend strong notes of color to the brilliant scene.

Acolytes and the Porte-Croix—the bearers of the

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heavy Cross—and the choristers who were to lead the singers, headed the procession. As each following boat came into view, the pale, misting sunlight fell, with lingering hesitancy, on the intense purple robes of the Bishop, on those of his canons, on the airy laces, on the white lawns of the surplices, on the scarlet gowns of the choir-boys and on the richly embroidered banners.

As I looked at the majestic central figure—at the Bishop standing upright, stiffened to rigidity, that he might keep his pose—on this towering shape, with his golden mitre shining in the sun's pale rays, while before him the immobile acolyte upheld the tall gold cross—why was it that, as I gazed at the magnificence of this crowned son of the church, certain far-off scenes, certain imaged pagan ceremonies rose up to join, in mysterious, shadowy splendor, this Christian festival? Why did the flower-wreathed priests of Delos, why did the incense-swinging acolytes of Apollo, why did the winey purples of the Ægean, bearing on their crimson waves also flower-decked masts and garlanded sails—why, I asked myself, did those dead and gone scenes of a dead religion loom up to take part in this Catholic fête?

The ringing voices of the choristers, singing the cantiques, now burst upon the ear. Priests and canons joined their deep male voices to the lighter

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trebles of the boyish notes. From the anchored fishing fleet—whose decks were crowded with townsfolk, with fishermen's families—there rang up, presently, a chorus of voices. Crew after crew joined in; the thronged quais took up the hymn, and "Je te salue, Marie!" surged up to the open skies, as in Greece, centuries ago, the Apolline hymn was shouted by thousands, till the very hills rocked with song.

In these paler-toned waters, the sea also was singing. The waves were dashing against the quais. Sullen, gray-faced, the soulless sea was in a relentless mood. It sent its curving billows to sweep the sands; its ever-mounting waters were showing the foam of a dancing fury.

"With the sea coming in, they'll never go out," said a man who sat on the parapet.

"The Bishop has no desire to get his feet wet," remarked the sailor, with a dry chuckle.

"There they go—they are singing lullabys again!" And the fisherman's voice was unmistakably tinged with a note of contempt. "Ah, well, we mustn't be too hard on them. Our day has come, at last."

"Yes," answered the sailor, with a bitter accent. "They kept us straight enough, and tight enough, for centuries—pour des siècles et des siècles. Oh! we mustn't think, we mustn't learn to read, we must

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work like slaves, we must give to this, to that, to everything that wore a dirty monk's robe! While those gentlemen lived like princes, drank wine neither we—yes—nor our children could ever taste, though we were dying! Ugh! Those gentlemen have cost us too dear! They must go!”

The moaning of the sea seemed to echo this infidel outburst. The waves were now pounding the quais.

The garlanded boats were moving on; the singing choir was intoning a sonorous chant. Presently, a sudden hush came. The singers folded their books. The fishermen and the crowd on the quais were rigid; for the great moment had come. The Bishop's boat had swung out between the two arms of the quais, and only the noisy sea answered the slow, impressive

“Consider, Lord, our supplications, and bless this sea. . . .”

The Bishop's voice rang out strong and clear. For the closing words of the prayer, “Oh, thou who livest and reignest from century to century!” he found superb tones that filled the great airy spaces.

Immediately after, the music of drums and trumpets crashed upon the ear. The Bishop then lifted his censer, swept the unresponsive seas with his shower of incense, and the stilled and breathless multitude came to life. There was the buzzing of thousands of human tongues.



A PORT-EN-BESSIN FISHERMAN



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The fisherman-skeptic had not moved. His blue orbs had been riveted on every action of the Bishop. As the censer had been gracefully swept across the heaving water-surface, he murmured, with a scornful laugh, "As though that sprinkling from a hairy brush were going to tame the sea! Ah! he knows well enough it's all a farce! But he plays the game—all the same—for it pays—*le grand gaillard!*"

A delicate-visaged lady above the scoffer was moved to expostulate. She bent over the knitted jersey—she laid a kindly hand on the bony shoulder. "Surely—*mon ami*," she breathed gently, into his ear—"surely those of us who see a divine Providence overruling all things,—surely such believers would feel a peculiar peace descend upon them—surely those who must remain at home find a deeper faith, a fuller hope, when the tempest blows, and their loved ones are at the mercy of the winds—when they remember these prayers, this dear blessing——"

The fisherman had listened patiently enough; he had even doffed his *béret*, as the lady accosted him. When she stopped, he sprang to his feet. His face was hot and angry. His eyes were bloodshot. He grasped, in his earnestness, not only his interlocutor, he had my own arm in his firm hold. He pulled us both backward—he made us face the open sea!

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"Mesdames—look—before you! Look at that!" And then he wheeled us to right about, showing us the towering, shadowy cliffs. "Has a Bishop's prayer ever kept the sea from turning those walls to whitened cemeteries? Has holy water ever saved a drowning man? Have those falaises ever made themselves smaller, reaching out arms to help a ship in distress, because a churchful of priests came down to sing cantiques? Bah! You know it's all nonsense, as well as I!"

With that he released us. He left us staring into each other's faces.

"Quel drôle de type!" exclaimed the lady, in a frightened tone, and she looked away from the sea, as though it were an enemy.

"Ah—here you are!" rang out joyously; and never had Carola's voice sounded as sweet.

She hooked her arm in mine, as she added, in a tone of reproach, "How did you lose us? And wasn't it wonderful? I never saw such a scene—the blessing of the sea gave me a positive thrill." And her face was grave, strangely sweet.

"It was the singing—all those voices ringing up from the boats and the quais that was the most impressive part of the ceremony. Clever man, our friend the curé!" was the Baron's comment.

"But come! we must be hurrying along—we don't

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want to let the char-à-bancs have a chance to block the road."

In an incredibly short space of time we were whirling through the farm-lands, past châteaux, and rushing along hedges and lawns that were curiously like an English landscape. There had been no time to note the real beauty of this unfamiliar country in our running down to the Port. The speed was less rapid, on this return journey; and the curiously un-French character of the land that lies between the coast and Bayeux, the English lanes, English countryside life, English ways of cutting the very hedges recalled Freeman's assertion that when the Normans came and conquered this Neustrie they found the land already laid out in English fashion. Had not the Saxons been here a century or two?

My companions on the front seat of the car were not looking at the landscape. The Baron was too careful a driver not to keep a sharp eye on the road; but there were chances for tender glances, for hurried words, all the more effective for their brevity. Carola's gay laughter, her animated manner, and the coquettish tossings of her head were proof as clear as the now translucent skies that sixty miles was too short a run for all there was to be said and heard.

Chapter X

OUR LAST OUTING

A GROUP OF LITTLE TOWNS

DURING the days that followed, Carola's state of mind—her varying states of mind—might have been likened to the changefulness of the Norman skies. Now tender, suffused with summer warmth, full of the promise of rare and continuous radiance, these northern skies draw about their otherwise riant countenance the veil of a fog-like mystery.

Carola showed her lover distracting contrasts. Now she was tender, acquiescent, adorable; she was in love with whatever bore the name of France; she was prepared to accept the Baron's self-complacent estimate—the estimate of all his fellow-countrymen—that France and Frenchmen led the world still, at least in the somewhat extensive domain of art, letters, the drama, and equally, of course, in the art of living. Paris was indeed "La Ville Lumière," since its genius lighted a world that, without such edifying illumination, would grope about in more or less cimmerian darkness.

The mood following this would be full of danger signals. America would be, so to speak, the eye of the storm. To be an American, one born—and more

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particularly one to the manor-born—was the greatest privilege conferred upon a human being. To live in America was to be in the front of things—to be in the rush and in the giddy tumult of actuality. All the true progress of the world, the heat and zest of those movements that were pushing the world forward, the solution of problems that were now shaking society to its foundations, all this magnificent display of power, of prodigious mental vitality, was one to be found in the States whose true boundaries are the stars!

“I do not understand your friend,” the poor Baron would confide, after such an outburst, “she is so strange. One day, it is with France she is—as you say—in love. And the next, she will only like, only care for things American.” And Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale would have his difficult hour.

That Carola intended, however, to keep strictly within the boundaries she had settled as fixed, during a period she confessed to be probationary, was proved on a certain afternoon. She neither proposed to be hurried, she announced for the hundredth time, in this momentous decision, nor would she permit the hovering figure of her fate to spoil her summer sport. This she announced, with a solemn air of finality.

“Yes—I admitted I was willing to give him every chance—this I told him again last night. He can

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have a wide field, one singularly free from competitors—lucky man!—but, on my side, I also demand perfect freedom.” As usual in such conversations, on whatever topic we touched, in the end there came the circling about the one subject of supreme interest. Lovers have a power of concentration equalled only by the great thinkers; but even scientists and philosophers have some mercy; when they move among men they do not fill the world with sighs and lamentations, or with a never-ending analysis of the state of their feelings; whereas a lover, at every varying stage of the courtship, would consider he or she had actually defrauded the confidant of the moment, were the latter not kept in touch with each feverish mounting of the emotional pulse!

Carola would angrily have resented the insinuation that she indulged in over-expansiveness. Her own boast, indeed, once confessed, was “that considering how tremendous the possibilities were,” she was a model of discretion.

The open road, on the whole, seemed far less conducive to confidences than eighteen-century boudoirs. A note from the Baron suggesting we might take a run down to Trouville, to hear Touche and his orchestra, was therefore eagerly accepted. “Although, of course, it will end, by my looking at the sea, and listening to the music, while you and your admirer

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sit and gaze at each other," was my resigned comment, as I folded the acceptance.

Carola barely listened. She was trying on one hat after another. Her sole outburst was, "I look a positive fright! Nothing seems to suit me to-day!"

The denial of this statement was to be read in the instantaneous approval of the Baron's rapid survey. He stood by the side of the car a few minutes later; as he watched Carola gathering her muslins and chiffon embroideries preparatory to spreading them with care, once she was seated, he murmured, "How the Marie Louise blue in your hat brings out the blue of your eyes, Madame!"

Although Carola scoffed, lightly, at a Frenchman's knowledge of clothes, and asked if men in France went through a preparatory school of costume at their Lycées, she had flushed at the compliment.

We were soon fronting the Trouville beaches. On the broad piazzas of the hostelry where Touche and his admirable orchestra were giving the silent crowd of music-lovers an inspiring rendering of Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony," we, in our turn, were held spellbound by the magic of the sonorous harmonies.

We were fortunate in arriving before Touche himself had finished his violoncello solo. The air

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was vibrant still with the echoes of the master's poetic interpretation. The stirring minors had left the soul wrapped in a sort of idyllic melancholy. Prolonged sadness, however, was impossible in the midst of a scene as brilliantly gay. The crowd under the awnings had quickly recaptured its holiday spirit, its murmurous lightness of voice and laughter. The beaches below the veranda were a-swarm with pleasure-seekers, with children shouting at their play in the sands; and beyond, the blue, sunlit sea was in conspiracy to attune this world to irresponsible enjoyment.

The Baron had been filling the pauses between the musical numbers with the somewhat irrelevant remark:

"You really, Madame, should see some more of these little towns about here." He had courteously addressed me, but his eyes were, of course, on Carola.

Never before had his gaze and attitude been as betraying. If ever a human being made manifest, through the fleshly medium of two flame-lit orbs, the inner passion that was mounting to the point of betrayal, the Baron's fixed intensity of glance revealed his state. "Cannot you see I adore you? Do you not hear my love knocking at your heart for admission? Do not you see the state to which you have brought me?"

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The lightning-stroke was blazing in sparks about its victim.

Carola was not as calm as she wished to appear. The flush on her cheeks proved the message had reached her. She suddenly took her gaze from the sands, to say, with an accent of semi-irritation, as though the situation were becoming unbearable:

"What was it you proposed—what are we going to do—after the concert is over? We can't sit here and gaze at each other, for the rest of the afternoon."

The glance she gave her lover said as plainly as though, instead of the words uttered, she had told him she didn't intend to be made love to, in that betraying manner, an instant longer.

That unuttered message also reached its destination.

For the Baron straightened himself, as though at an imperative word of command. He let the longing die out of his eyes. "If *ces dames* would permit me take them on a little expedition—just a few miles out, to Lisieux—no further?"

Carola's brow cleared at once. She seemed greatly to relish the proposition; she was instantly all animation, her cheeks a normal pink, and her voice was suddenly charged with its wonted gayety and light mockery as she rippled:

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"For a clever man, your remark appears to be extraordinarily far-fetched. How ever did your mind rush from Schubert to an automobile trip to some little provincial town?"

"Nothing simpler. Touche's mastery of his instrument suggested some *quatuors* I heard rehearsed recently, in a certain château, near Lisieux. In thinking of Lisieux—I——"

"Yes—yes—I see—I see. Must we start at once? Must these little towns be seen before the moon rises?" was Carola's gay question.

The Baron grew serious. He had an inspired look, as he exclaimed, "Why not? Let us go at once! There are three good hours before dinner—and, were we late, there is a fine moon to light us home. Pont l'Evêque and Lisieux are at their best in the late afternoon glow. Dont say no——"

He need not have feared a refusal from Carola. The impromptu was the clarion note never sounded in vain, to her ears. She had already risen: she was gathering her voluminous veils about her, was silencing some remonstrances I had murmured, had dispatched a card, with the succinct message written in an unintelligible scrawl, to her companion, Miss West, "Shall not be at home to-night, staying at Manoir . . ." and we were presently whirling along the narrow Trouville streets.



STREET VIEW—LISIEUX



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The rush along the Touques road was made at a high rate of speed. We were to be at Lisieux no later than five, if possible. There were the long green vistas of the Touques valley below, with the gleam of the river sparkling in and out of the tree-branches and meadow-grasses. We dashed into the town, to slow down sufficiently to glance at the interesting little church of Saint Pierre, with its octagonal tower, pierced with its gothic windows. How still, how dead, was the little town, that in the long-ago eleventh century had had its hour of bustling activity, of importance! At the neighboring Château de Bonneville, William the Conqueror had come, not once, but again and again, to hunt, to dream the great dream his genius turned into achievements. To the little town of Touques yonder, with its innocent air of never having had any historic fact to record, William the Red had hurried, to embark for England, in the year that saw him crowned King of England.

Now we were on the military road of Pont l'Évêque. There came presently the long descent leading into the plain. The low hills dipped and rose; there were glimpses into wooded depths, across farm-lands, over moss-grown cottages; and soon there were the level stretches below, of the lovely valley. We were whirling under bridges and rat-

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ting over cobble-paved streets, with stately looking town-houses and their wall-enclosed gardens to announce Pont l'Evêque was reached.

The Baron brought his car to a stop at the door of an old-fashioned inn, on the high-street. A new man appeared to have taken possession of us, in this eager-eyed, alert, authoritative-voiced gentleman. As a showman of mediæval towns, the Baron was to present a fresh revelation of his character. His absorbed, lover-like attitude was temporarily to give way to the enthusiasm of the connoisseur. The hurried, all but excited manner in which he cried, as he bundled us out of the car, "Come—there is a house you must see. It is most amusing, particularly the roof!" proved Baron de Gaspé-Royale was possessed of other passions beside those evoked by a beautiful American widow.

"I can only hope," he exclaimed, "we are not too late. This house I am taking you to see once belonged to the great Mademoiselle de Montpensier. Probably built for an overseer, or a superintendent, it is a most interesting example of the fine domestic architecture of the seventeenth century. Now it is an *ouvroir*, a school of embroidery, for girls; some sisters are still left—as teachers."

He led us down the high street, past the tidy little shops and the low houses that made irregular out-

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lines along the winding thoroughfare. He plunged suddenly, into an alley, at our left. Some timbered houses were grouped about an inner court. These we passed to find ourselves confronting a garden gate, an open square, and a nobly-featured façade.

The broad house, with its fine roof, showing the beautiful curves seventeenth-century builders delighted in, had as its frontal ornament, a quaint porch, beneath which branched a stone stairway. These features the Baron pointed out, as proving the inexhaustible fertility of invention, the breadth of design of these earlier architectural geniuses.

"There's nothing small—nor mean, you see. It's all on a large, superb scale. But the roof—wait till you see the roof! *Ma Socur*—will you allow us to enter, to go up your stairs?"

To the smiling Sister who had emerged from a side-door, the Baron had doffed his hat. The Sister nodded her assent; tripping towards an inner room close to the entrance door, she presently returned to say, "Certainly, Monsieur, it is both our duty and our pleasure."

"The Sisters must keep the house open, you know. They must be ready to show it to anyone—to all visitors," whispered our guide. "It is one of the conditions imposed, since the separation of church and state."

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One might have imagined the rule was one of the most easily accomplished of her vows, to judge by the urbanity with which the Sister made us welcome.

At the various landings, on the stairway, wide rooms opened out. In some of these, children and babes were crying. "Yes, Mesdames, we have a *crèche* as well as a work and embroidery school," said the Sister, with the calm smile of the woman to whom the cares and anxieties of motherhood are vicarious and incidental occupations. Other rooms were filled with groups of girls bending over embroidery frames. White-capped sisters lifted serious faces from broad strips of linen laid on the many tables; heads were raised and needlework suspended as we passed. It was a busy, active scene.

At last, the top landing was reached.

Enormous beams, criss-crossed, and others upright and sturdy, rose to pyramidal heights above our heads. The Baron pointed out, with the precision and delight of an expert, the marvel of the huge wooden pins that held together this bold timber-work supporting the great roof.

"Imagine a modern architect planning a roof on any such superb lines! Look at the height, at the breadth of it! It might be a church, a miniature cathedral. Does one not feel the lovely slope, the

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harmony of the exterior from the very way the beams are laid?" he cried, running his hands lovingly over the rough old woods.

"Is Monsieur an architect?" soberly inquired the Sister, lifting mildly questioning eyes to the Baron's flushed face.

"Ah, *ma Socur!* would that I were!" was the Baron's quick response.

"We have many, coming to us. They are all very good talkers—*beaux parleurs*—like Monsieur!" was the nun's quiet comment, as she preceded us down the stairs.

"I hope you will not be too puffed-up!" was Carola's sly aside, to her companion. "Those sisters are only women, after all. They soon find out a man's weak points."

The Baron barely took time to smile. He was hurrying us back to the car. "There are some effects I want to show you, in just this light, at Lisieux," he kept saying.

In an inconceivably short space of time we were whirling down the main street, out into a side road that led into the open country.

"Look behind you, to your left!" was shouted out to us. "It is worth while, that view!"

The view that was indeed worth while was an admirable ensemble; across a foreground of meadows

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and low trees the eye caught the fine lines of the de Montpensier hotel, from the rear. A medley of roofs and timbered façades led the eye to the church, with its huge conical tower rising into the sky; the late afternoon lights made a mellow fusion of the several contrasting tints and tones of weather-worn stones, dull bricks, slated roofs and green foliage. The picture was harmonised and softened by the enveloping golden mist.

Chapter XI

THE ARTIST'S SECRET

WE were no sooner in Lisieux than we came to a stop. Lisieux, we were peremptorily informed, was a town to be seen on foot.

"There are any number of little Italian towns that are less interesting than Lisieux, to which people go, on long journeys. They make a prolonged study of such towns, when they reach them. Yet, here is a most remarkable little place, crowded with beautiful wooden houses, full of churches, with a history as old as history itself, and who knows it? Less than an hour from Trouville, it is as little visited as though it were in central Africa——" was the Baron's monologue, as he stepped quickly through the streets that, at first, seemed to belie his praises.

Once in the rue des Fèvres, however, and the Middle Ages were a reality. Here was a street of genuine carved wooden houses. Color and outline were as changed as are the centuries. Houses with wide mullioned windows; houses with low shops opening out upon the street, and beautifully spaced windows above, set between monster carved heads,

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or decked with a frieze—the latter representing a biblical scene; houses ribboned with colored timbers whose square beams were carved with grotesque heads, and with grimacing, leering faces, such caricatures succeeded saints and apostles. The Baron eyed the buildings with brightened eyes.

“So amusing all these old details—all these traces of color. One’s eyes are no longer accustomed to such odd lines, curves, and grotesque carvings. It is an abandoned type, an art as lost as is that of certain glazes. Yet what a sense of neighborliness, of intimacy in such an old town! Those wooden houses are like a crowd of gaily-costumed people, closely packed, gossiping, presenting each other with gay bouquets, decked in bright colors, like people going to a festival. Think of all these houses, freshly painted, packed with the life of those earlier centuries, and with a church like that, for a neighbor!” With an air of triumph the Baron pointed to the church that filled the top of the dim, musty street.

“What a magnificent stairway!” exclaimed Carola. And magnificent it was. This gothic stairway before us, with its balustrade showing the shell of Saint Jacques, is the glory of the church; the steps, perfectly rounded, curved from the street to the parvis above. The church itself was found to be

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disappointingly simple after this grandiose frontispiece.

The street below the stately stairway, to the right, took us into the open market square where Lisieux's Cathedral and its episcopal palace still form an imposing mass.

We were led, with almost brutal haste, to look first upon the tomb, within the Cathedral, of Lisieux's most famous—because most infamous—Bishop. A certain absidal chapel, called *Chapelle de la Vierge* was built in expiation of the death of Joan of Arc—and built by the man who betrayed her!

After having sold her to the English, this Bishop Cauchon—the Judas among the Bishops—offered as a sop to his soul, this “Chapel to the Virgin!” The further study of the interesting points of this fine Cathedral were left for a future date. There was time, however, to note a striking resemblance, in purity of style, between this Lisieux Cathedral and the one at Laon.

“We must have just a glimpse of the ‘golden chamber,’ in the old Episcopal Palace,” said the Baron. “It is a little late, past the hour for admission. But the concierge is a friend of mine. And this is the light in which one should see it.”

We were soon mounting the monumental stair-

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way leading to the celebrated Bishop's council chamber. The wrought-iron balustrade showed the initials of Bishop de Matignon, whose arms we were to see, in the painted medallions of the ceiling, in the "Chamber Doreé."

Golden indeed was the stately room we now entered. The slanting sun-rays poured their effulgence on the gilded arabesques ornamenting doors and panels; the caissons aloft were resplendent, under the double glow of the decorative tinting and the sun's lighting.

The "grisailles" were each a masterpiece. There was an air of stately splendor unusual in most of the palace-rooms on exhibition. To fill the room with a company of richly clad ecclesiastics; to imagine the grave, far-reaching questions discussed; to see a group of serious-browed Bishops, wending their way downwards, to the cool and airy formal garden that stretched its length beneath these gold-embroidered arabesques, required but slender imaginative gifts. Room and garden completed each other.

Such were some of our mutually interchanged remarks as we left the state of the "Chamber Doreé" to follow the twistings and windings of the little river—the Touques.

"For until you have seen the women washing in the river, and all the decayed, delightful old houses

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tumbling about their ears, you will never truly have seen Lisieux."

And the Baron, as usual, was right. In following the river we saw a Lisieux no modern tourist sees, unless he seeks it out. Here was the old town the great Lords and Bishops knew; here were tanneries packed in between the stables, huge sheds with a grass plot on one side, and a palace for an opposite neighbor. Timbered houses were guarded by sentinel poplars; and a terraced garden, with weeping willows, showed the towering front of St. Jacques, in perspective.

The Lisieux washerwomen were particularly active. "Yet, commonly, it is in the morning they wash," mused the Baron, as we stood on a bridge looking down at a long line of bent backs, bared arms, and the usual motley mess of damp rags and linens.

"They knew we were coming! They know, too, how these reflections in the water set off the view," cried Carola, showing the long stretches of the white, faint-blue and the reddish tints the gowns and shirts made, intermingled with the women's bright fichus and dark blue aprons.

"Perhaps their industry is to be explained by the competition—yonder——"

"What are those men doing?" was Carola's amazed half laugh, half shriek.

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A nearer view proved the occupation of dozens of soldiers to be precisely the same as that of the kneeling women; they also were beating the clothes before them; coats, soldier's uniforms, scarlet blouses, caps even, were being plentifully soused by their owners. And from the merry fusillade going on between the women nearer to the stream, and the energetic washermen above, this cleansing process appeared to be a mere pretext for the soldiers to make friends with Lisieux's fair inhabitants.

Our stroll took us into a street that lured the eye. It was one flooded with sunshine. Should we chance on an architectural gem, it would, we agreed, be perfectly lighted. The street, however, at first presented the usual aspect of provincial stagnation. Neither houses, gate-ways, nor courts yielded a feature of interest.

It was Carola's voice that brought our steps to a standstill. "Look, at your left! Look at that boy! 'Antinous—nose and curls and the level gaze—a true Greek. What a beauty!"

The Baron laughed, looked closer, with his clever Frenchman's slanting gaze, and then he too, broke forth. "You are right. He is a wonder. Let us see what he is doing."

The low shop window was open to the street. A broad table stretched its breadth beyond the window

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ledge. Over this table, a youth in a coarse yellow-white blouse was bending; he was cutting, with dexterous skill, into an oval piece of wood; within the disc, the classic love-knot of the Pompadour and a garland of conventionalized roses proved the lad's skill.

"A wood-carver, and in the twentieth century!" Carola's tones chimed delight. The youth lifted his blue eyes, first to stare, at the sight of the three faces confronting him, then to blush, and finally to smile.

"You work well," said the Baron. He passed a knowing finger over the edges of the rose-petals whose delicate curves showed an artistic sense of form.

The lad blushed again. "Monsieur is kind," he murmured. He was confused; he dug the point of his knife into a budding leaf.

"There is an enchanting *chaise-longue*, in there, yonder, in the corner—let us go in," Carola cried, nodding towards the interior of the shop. Impetuously, she led us to the object of her desire.

The lad left his stool. His great eyes followed Carola as she circled about the graceful chair, as though she were a creature that had floated, as might a divinity, down from the upper spheres.

Even the Baron approved of the *chaise-longue*.

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"Are you alone in the shop?" he asked, sharply, of the lad.

"*Non, Monsieur.* The boss=*le patron*—he will be here on the instant. I go to fetch him."

The apprentice put a quick hand behind him, pulled off his blouse, plucked a cap from an obscure corner, a bicycle from another, and was wheeling down the street, whistling as he sped onwards.

Carola sat down on one of the three pieces composing the *chaise-longue*—that she avowed should presently be hers. Then she gayly clapped her hands. "*Cher Baron*—this is what makes a mediæval city in your adorable France so perfect. Out of this dull street, to come upon such a beauty as that youth—and this wonder——" looking backward at her carved seat.

"Is Lisieux a mediæval city?" The Baron was quite ready to discuss that point, or any other. For Carola, having installed herself in the deep-seated fauteuil, had taken, consciously or unconsciously, a most effective pose. Her vivid coloring was the warmer for the pallid masks, the casts of the Venuses, the plaster Cupids, and the long panels of Renaissance reproductions that made the decorative if somewhat motley background. She filled the scene as her brilliant alertness held the eye.

The charm Carola found in the discovery of a live



WASHERWOMAN—LISIEUX



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Greek in a rude little Normandy shop, and in a "pure" Louis XV piece of furniture, the Baron was experiencing in the more delicate personal delight of watching the woman he adored.

"How absurd you are! Of course Lisieux is nothing if it isn't feudal, and gothic and all the rest of it. What else have we been saying, all the afternoon?"

The Baron's eyes told Carola he didn't care a *sou* whether Lisieux was modern or mediæval. Carola answered his look by a flushed cheek, but she rattled on, gayly.

"How spoiled you Europeans are! You must have your *scene de decor* complete, without a flaw, and as smelly as possible, or it says nothing to your blighted imaginations. Yes, blighted! Now we, we are simple, but far more gifted. We can reconstruct a beautiful old town in a moment, can't we?" And Carola, with her most solemn expression, appealed to me.

That we were somewhat less exacting in the matter of ensemble than were critical continentals, I was forced to admit.

"There—you see! She upholds my point of view. We are truly artistic—we possess the very quality you deny us." The poor Baron looked alarmed at the vehemence of this attack. He was about to pro-

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test; but Carola went on, in her flashing, authoritative way.

"Oh, yes, you do. You consider that we Americans know nothing about art, or beauty; we are merely money getters, money spenders. Oh, I know! Well—there—Yes, you may sit down," and Carola made a place for her friend—the human target she meant to pierce. But she took pains to place the target cosily, comfortably, where every shaft would tell. She now fixed her eyes full upon the Baron. "I shall prove my point and in most conclusive fashion. Here are you, with centuries behind you, of culture, and critical acumen, born of creative, artistic work. I don't deny you have possessed, in the past, great talents. And here you are, the heirs of all you have done, since the Renaissance. And here—here am I—here are we——" Carola was good enough to include me, in her breathless exordium. "And yet we are supposed to have inherited nothing, to be as ignorant as the red Indian—to have done nothing worth mentioning in two hundred and fifty years, except to have cleared some forests, built cities, and got rich. We are nothing more, in spite of our riches, from the Continental point of view, than ignorant parvenues."

Carola had indiscreetly paused for breath. The Baron discreetly seized the pause to protest, and

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eloquently. Really, she was going too far. It was rather envy than contempt that was proved by the few comments inadvertently made on America and Americans. After all, what was to be gained by such a discussion, and why? . . .

Carola lifted a white wand of a finger. "This," she dictatorially announced. "I am about to prove my point. Now, which of us has really felt the poetry of——?"

"Here is the patron," ejaculated the Baron, in a tone of immense relief. He rose as he spoke. Even Carola was silent. For the artistic-looking personage who, on entering his shop, gave a rapid survey of the group before him, had a commanding air. Then he came forward, hat in hand.

He bowed, with a Frenchman's grace. He began to make the tour of his shop, almost immediately. The Baron asked him the history of one article after another. This Henri Pictot and the Baron thereupon promptly fraternized on the handling of the first piece of carving presented. It was the work of "Antinous;"—a partridge stretched in its length, across a fine panel. The Baron's discriminating praises proved him both a sportsman and an art critic.

"Wonderful, that look of the bird, just fallen to the ground!" and he pointed to the curl of the

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claw, and the wing clinging, in its collapsed muscular rigidity, to the round body.

There were other interesting bits handed to us. There were some copies of scroll work, of saints in their gothic shrines, carved Normandy cupboards, and some delightful reproductions of Henri IV and of the Louis XV, and Louis XVI chairs, some of characteristic Norman design.

Pictot warmed to the enthusiast in presenting his work and that of his pupils. In the Baron he had quickly discovered a fellow lover and critic of the best work of the great periods. All his shop contained was now rooted out; great trousseaux chests were pulled from dim recesses; tables and desks, in various stages of restoration, must be examined, as Pictot explained, ejaculated, sighed, over the state into which carving had fallen in this "democratic age."

"For it is that, you see, Monsieur," Pictot all but ignored us, even Carola was but a foreigner—only the Baron was appealed to. "It is this age of the parvenu, of the bourgeois, that kills art. Machinery is their god. Quite good enough for the man who has made his money by machinery——"

"But surely there are some connoisseurs——"

"Ah, but yes! or else we should have to put up our shutters! Our architects—it is to them we look. *Tenez*, there are three large Villas at Deauville. For

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one, I carved the whole salon, three years ago—in the Louis XV period, and now I am doing it all over.

“How’s that?”

“The caprice of a great lady,” Pictot shrugged as he mentioned a name of world-wide financial fame. “She now says Louis XV is overdone. She chooses a more severe epoch—for a change. It is all right, such caprices are a good thing for us.”

The Baron had followed the artist-sculptor in to an inner room. From thence came scraps of their quick interchange of talk.

“Very amusing, that bit!”

“That bit,” happened to be a Renaissance scroll that ended in the pouting lips of a dolphin; for we had meekly followed though we continued to be ignored. The masculine backs were now bent over a panel; the Baron was handling a monster monk’s head.

“Capital—that—where did you get the model?”

“In a neighboring Château, Monsieur. They still use it, for salt.” And the sculptor opened the top of the monk’s head, and thrust his hand into the deep cavity.

“And this monk’s head, is this for sale?” interpolated Carola, in a bland tone which belied her restive look. The artist turned shop-keeper on the instant.

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"But yes, Madame, it is for sale. We do not carve simply for the pleasure of carving," he added, with a smile.

"There you are wrong. The Renaissance artists—~~—~~" Carola had begun, but was cut off with,

"Pardon, Madame, neither in the Renaissance nor now, nor even in Greece did artists work for love. They have always worked to sell. It is only poets, writers, who are content to sing or write for pleasure, at least so some of them say. *Mais moi!*" The shrug told us this provincial's opinion of literary disinterestedness.

Carola was not to be silenced. "If Socialism continues you will all work for the State. Money will not then be permitted, as a stimulus."

The sculptor, it appeared, was a red-hot imperialist. His hands were in the air, his hair was tossed about, as though it were a troublesome mane, and, standing with his feet apart, in the dim obscurity of his little shop, Pictot struck an oratorical attitude.

"Socialism, Madame? But it is killing us, little by little. We artists will soon die, as France is beginning to die, and for the same reason. We shall leave no offspring. For an art to live, it must create workmen. It must tell its secrets to the young. It must breathe the fire of its enthusiasm



HOUSES OVERHANGING THE RIVER LISIEUX

1

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into youthful breasts, it must teach the apprentice, nurse him, educate his taste, develop his talent." Pictot took time to breathe. He tossed his black mane, took his hands out of the air, where they had been violently gesticulating. He brought his feet together with a click; and he folded his arms against his chest. He was in such tremendous earnest, he even forgot to remember how impressive was his attitude.

"I announce to you, for I know, Madame—the apprentice, he is dying, he is all but dead!"

Pictot's tone of despair was genuine. He seemed to be singing the dirge of art.

The Baron was the first to break the instant's silence.

"Surely, you exaggerate. Even socialists are clever enough to see, that to live, trade and commerce must go on. And if we cease to produce we cease to exist."

Pictot shook his head, sorrowfully. "Alas! Monsieur, the socialist, he is not a reasoning animal. He only sees one thing. You have plenty, too much. He intends to possess himself of all you possess. *Voilà—c'est cela*. The whole philosophy of socialism consists in that."

"But how comes it, then, that quite wonderful reproductions are still made, of all the beautiful

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things of the past?" Carola cried, the American commonsense pushing for place.

"Ah, Madame, what will you? There are still some of us left, some of us who love our work. And we are able to interest and to educate one, sometimes as many as two, all the Trade League allows us—two apprentices. *Tenez!* Five years ago in my patron's shop, in the rue Jouffroy, in Paris, there used to be forty boys in the night class. All carvers—a few were training for design. How many are there now? Just six!"

"The others, what are they doing?" insisted Carola.

"They have gone into the machine shops, some are running *voiturettes*," (delivery tricycles) "some are in hotels, running lifts, others are porters, anything now but art. It is too long. Money must be made fast. The parents are the first to preach that. So France, in another ten years, will have no more carvers, except a few survivors, in the small towns, like this boy, like Pierre. How many boys in Paris will stand all day long, cutting leaves and figures out of wood, and for thirty francs a month?"

The sculptor was now wrapping up the partridge panel, the monk's head, and a charming sixteenth-century Virgin, three feet high, as he asked directions for sending them to Carola's address.

2

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Antinous, beyond the sculptor, stood behind the door. As we passed out, he came forward, to stand and bow from the waist.

Such bows, with so many other charming customs, will go out, doubtless, along with the enthusiasm and fire on the sculptor's face. Such smiles will fade, that is, until the time comes when both will be relit, at some other or at the same old altar. For political systems change and nations die, but, happily, enthusiasm, a love and belief in devotion to beauty is one of the divine things implanted in the human soul. The torch art kindles is passed on, from race to race.

Such were the Baron's reflections as we dashed into the Pont-L'Evêque plain.

Finding myself on the front seat of the car, on this return journey, and Carola and the Baron on the back cushions, should have brought no surprise, had I but remembered the ingenious methods of lovers, to secure, by stratagem, a situation from which they could, with apparent innocence, ensure a certain privacy.

I had turned, with a protest on my lips,—but the words died before they were given breath. A single glance proved the futility of interference; Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale had already captured one of the outlying defenses—Carola's hand lay unresistingly in his. There was a look on both faces that was as

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betraying as the glow that irradiated the Baron's transformed features. Though the two were ostensibly looking down into the valley—what even the gold-tinted plain, what the amber skies could not have effected, was luminously clear. Here were two beings for whom a perfect, a divine moment of life had come. A delicate vibration seemed to be communicated to the illumined air—that trembled, as we passed—as though responding to the quickened mystery of sensation, of mounting emotion the silent clasping of two human hands had precipitated.

The birds that caroled to their mates to join them in the flight, upwards, to their hidden nests; the tender mists, that curved like a lover's arm about the valley, below the feet of the low hills; the cattle, moving in processional gravity, across the yellow grasses; the flock of the drifting clouds, herded as though by some unseen shepherd, whose lantern wrought a magic of transfiguration—all this wondrous music, motion, radiance, seemed a world transformed, to uplift into some sublimated sphere two beings in this their hour of happiness.

Why was it, that the chime of destiny should ring out—across the fertile fields? Why should the wild impulse rise, to urge me to do my utmost to dash the cup of bliss from Carola's lips? In some incomprehensible way, I felt the premonitory shudder of

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apprehension. But then, you see, all this uncomfortable feeling might come from two very simple causes:—I had the chauffeur as my sole companion, and there were still twenty kilométres to make before dinner. . . .



Chapter XII

ON THE BEACH

THERE was a conscious look of new-born happiness on Carola's face when she strolled, at a late hour, on the following morning, into the rose-garden. The mingled shyness, the irrepressible radiance that shone from eyes and features—an elation that struggled valiantly with an assumption of easy composure—all this made a charming combination.

That the moment of full verbal confession, however, was to be delayed, was made immediately known. For Carola's words preceded her, as she advanced along the rose-hedge. She was holding a white card in her outstretched hand.

“Will you tell me what this means? And who are the de Montels’, and why in the name of all that is mysterious, should they ask me—a perfect stranger—to dine at Deauville—on the tenth?”

I produced from the depths of the blue apron I had donned, as the fitting garment in which, properly to cut off dead rose leaves, the replica of the card Carola held in her hand.

“There is no mystery. The Comtesse happens to be an old friend. She asks us to dinner—and—be-

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sides her civility in including you, she is obviously devoured with curiosity." And I went on snipping an over-blown rose.

"With curiosity! And you tell me there is nothing mysterious in all this?" I looked around just long enough to see the amazement written on Carola's brow.

"When you know as much as I do," I replied, solemnly, "one of the most respectable of human passions is to be read in that innocent note."

My friend was never renowned for possessing the virtue of patience. She tore away at my sleeve—and made it possible for a horrid, wiggling worm to slide down the smooth petal of a Baronne de Rothschild. "Will you talk in plain English, and explain?"

"See what you have done! You let that monster escape!" and I went down on my hands and knees, trying in vain to detect the whereabouts of the devastator. When I rose, unrewarded, and consequently in a state bordering on temper, I gave her the truth a trifle badly.

"Claire de Montel is your Baron's first cousin. She called yesterday, when we were at Lisieux—and she is now asking you to present yourself for inspection." I once more averted my eyes, and turned them to the Reine des Reines in front of me.

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There was an instant of perfect silence. Then came Carola's impatient remonstrance. "Of course, you know—I shall not go—and equally of course, you are simply absurd."

"Of course," I quietly acquiesced. I continued to examine the snowy petals before me with the eyes of a surgeon intent on discovering symptoms of decline.

"Really—you are not very amusing this morning," was the trite protest.

I removed my gaze from the rose to fix a calm glance on the half-angry eyes that dared not face me. "My dear," I began, blandly, "why should I be expected to be amusing? I am, it appears, a person of a single talent. I make a most excellent chaperon. In that capacity, at least, I think you will admit I have proved myself possessed of——"

But I never finished the sentence. Carola had seized me, butler's apron and all, and was planting a cool, firm pair of lips on one cheek after the other.

"Oh, you ridiculous dear! Now will you be serious. Come, take off that horror and let us go somewhere—where we can talk—and you can tell me everything!"

It ended in our going down to the beach. The sands below the cliffs were far away enough, from

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the house, to ensure a prolonged tête-a-tête. The talk resolved itself, in the end, into a long monologue.

Carola, I found, could not be drawn into the hoped-for avowal. Either the climax, in this love-drama, had not been reached, or Carola herself had not, or would not, as yet, make the momentous decision. A single outburst of semi-confidence escaped her.

"Don't press me—you see, I am not really sure—and until I know, don't urge—be good to me—and don't feel you must warn or preach. I intend to do nothing rash." And she closed my lips with another kiss.

A long silence fell between us. For the sands of the beach were warm. It was good to lie there, and fill our eyes with the beauty that was spread abroad, wherever the gaze wandered.

How happy one could be, we said, finally, with nature for a gossip and showman.

Havre yonder, across the blues, was transformed into a city of mist, amber-toned. There was indolent joy in watching the brown and white sails, drifting, dipping, cradled on waves that seemed bent on shirking and turning, treacherously, into mere ripples, that, in turn, would become fixed, in mirror-like calm, as the tide dropped. A fisherman's laughter, as he drew up his empty net, filled the quiet air-spaces with a Wagnerian solo violence. To the loud guf-

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faws there succeeded a busy stillness; there came the puffing breath of the idly-lifted sea; and, above, along the jagged cliff-edge, the slow, pushing motions of munching cattle, with their clinking chains to make a rude rhythm.

“What a deliverance from the dreary commonplace of a fashionable beach! Imagine exchanging this for that tented city yonder”—and Carola waved her hand toward Trouville, “and those over-elaborately gowned women, posing as nature-lovers, with their backs to the sea!”

Here, on the contrary, on this lovely strip of shore, she went on—one could go on indefinitely looking and feeling, and even listening. Surely, to watch those streaming banners of light, those drifting snow-clouds, streaking the azure—to have the blues of this summer sea come to press its last kiss upon the sands, here, below one’s very feet—and to catch the deep breath of the moving cattle, above, along the cliff—surely such novelties were sensation enough.

It was enough, until Carola’s errant fancy took a fresh flight. She rose to an upright, and turned eyes that had lost their look of happy dreaming, to show laughing depths, as she rippled,

“Dear me! with all this rhapsodizing, we are forgetting the object of our coming down here! Now.



THE CLIFF ABOVE THE BEACH—THE MANOIR

1

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begin, and tell me everything you know about Madame de Montel."

"That, my dear, would be a large contract. Paris has a new story about her nearly every day!"

"So much the better—I can see it is going to be delightful—wait a moment!" and Carola began, with busy hands, to pile up the sands behind her. She proposed to lie at full length, and have a cosy pillow. The structure finally completed, she planted her curls and puffs down upon the clean sands with a satisfied "Ouff!"

The next words were a command. "Now you are to give me the whole story—no matter how bad."

"But there is nothing bad to tell. Claire is a perfect wife, her husband adores her—she makes a sufficiently good mother, and is the most loyal of friends——"

"Then why does Paris talk about her?"

"Paris finds her amusing. She is original—a *genre* by herself—and that is even more of a novelty than to be wicked—in wicked Paris!"

She laughed at that, and ramming her head down still further into her hard pillow, she said imperatively, "Well—begin and make it long——!"

I obediently commenced my tale:

Chapter XIII

CLAIRE DE MONTEL

I HAVE always thought that Claire de Montel is a perfect type of the twentieth century Parisienne. She embodies the passion for *la vie mouvementée*—for sport, for ceaseless gayety, for keeping the ball rolling, in a word—as certain other Frenchwomen incarnate the character more familiar to us. The novels of the day have given us such an unending procession of frail ladies, of those who would assuredly have invented the seventh commandment had not Moses transmitted it to us—if only to furnish the novelists and the dramatists with their heroines—that a Claire de Montel seems almost abnormal. To hear of a woman who remains *grande dama*, yet one who sets Paris—the Paris of her world—in a roar; one who keeps her reputation untarnished, surrounded as she is by all the *viveurs* and wits of the day—such a woman is indeed a *rara avis*.

I will concede, at the outset, I have never met her double.

Now for her genesis.

Claire's mother had died at her birth. Her father, a distinguished diplomat, during the time of his mis-

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sion as Ambassador from France to the Court of St. James, had placed his daughter at a Preparatory School for Oxford graduates. At his death, Claire had been quickly rescued from these baneful English influences by her Catholic guardian, the Duchess de St. Rock.

The duchess, in her way, is also a personality. She belongs to the most rigidly exclusive of the St. Germain circles. Her world is bounded by the Faubourg on one side, and by her Church of St. Clothilde, on the other. Could she have her way, no foreigner would ever be permitted to enter the one—unless he had the requisite quarterings—and only such aristocrats as were on one's visiting list should be allowed to go to Heaven through the portals of the Faubourg's parish church.

The duchess, as the head of her family, exercises a good deal of power; for, in her world, to be *chef de famille* still carries with the title considerable authority. And the duchess, like all dowagers, throughout France, has had two religions—her Catholic faith, and her belief in her order. This latter as one of the cardinal articles of its creed, includes devotion to the interests of one's family. To work for the right placing of each and every member; to devote one's self, body and mind, to bringing about advantageous marriages—such is the business—the one industry a

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Frenchwoman of rank pursues, with a tenacity of purpose undreamed of elsewhere.

Now the duchess had married off her own and only daughter, the year before she received Claire as her ward. She was, therefore, so to speak, out of a job. Claire's coming to her was a positive boon; doubly welcome, when she found how pretty Claire was, and when she learned the size of her fortune. When she brought the girl back with her, from that "dreadful English school" as her grace called the College from which she rescued Claire, you should have seen her excitement.

She showed the child off to her entire world—and, then, at the end of a month, she whipped her into a convent. Claire, it appears, had proved too clearly the results of her English training; she was too clever by half—not that to be *spirituelle* is a crime, in the country of wits; far from it—only, Claire, you see, committed the error of showing her cleverness—before marriage!

The Dames de l'assomption, at Auteuil, were, therefore, given a year to obliterate the baneful effects of the disastrous Oxford system.

Meanwhile, the duchess was in her element. She lost not a moment in diligent search for the right *parti*.

With Claire's dot, her orphaned state, her beauty,

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and alas! her dangerous proclivities, this otherwise congenial task was rendered the more difficult. Claire's husband must be something quite out of the ordinary; of mature age, he must be the bearer of a lofty title and possess a certain fortune. Only a man of strong character could manage Claire.

The duchess's efforts were finally rewarded. She had found, she thought, a pearl of a husband. The "pearl" was of the right age, of wide social and marital experience, having been twice married, one wife having paid his debts, the second having left him her fortune.

In point of lineage, as the reigning Duc de Lièvre, he stood for all that was most exclusively aristocratic in the sacred Faubourg.

Once and once only had the twice bereaved, but still matrimonially inclined duke, been allowed to see Claire. That one glimpse had prompted him to lay his re-gilt coronet at the feet of "*cette enfant adorablement belle et aussi candide que belle.*" It was a rude shock to the enterprising aunt, to learn that the "adorably beautiful child" had no taste for this ducal pearl.

"If papa had lived, he would never have asked me to marry an old man—*un vieux*——" had been Claire's bland form of refusal, as she calmly bent over her tapestry.

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"Old!" The poor duchess had gasped. "It is a calumny. He is but fifty-nine!"

"And I—not yet nineteen." Here Claire laid aside her embroidery; she folded her hands in her lap, and lifted determined eyes to her aunt's angry visage. "Dear aunt, our ages don't match, you see. I have no mind to live with memories, with experience, and always under authority. No! No! Since marry I must—since one really, with decency, cannot remain single all one's life, continue to look about. You are so clever, you will surely find the right one. Only, please to remember, I intend to make a marriage of inclination, one with a young man—yet one not too young. He must have had some experience already, have had an escapade or two—they season a man." Claire had lifted a grave, serious face, to her aunt's scandalized countenance.

The bewildered duchess had only breath to ejaculate, "It is that English school!" Such a revelation of premature knowledge of men and life, coming from the innocent lips of a pure young girl, was almost too overwhelming for belief. Even the gentle Ladies of the Assumption, of aristocratic training and perfect manners, could never, the duchess realized, hope to obliterate the efforts of that pernicious influence—at least, not in a few short months.

"Le pli est fait——" groaned the poor lady, not

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in the least realizing she was quoting Renan. Though considerably weakened by this appalling discovery, she continued her pious task of finding the right young man, "one properly seasoned."

Meanwhile, Claire lived behind her convent walls, bored beyond endurance. She allowed herself one single distraction. Through mysterious agencies—ways known only to convent-bred girls—Claire possessed herself of all the best, and latest, French novels. These she read in secret, at night, by the light of two candles carefully screened, by ingenious devices. She proposed to be ready to meet her world, on equal terms, when the time came. In the public eye, she posed as a model of decorum; she practiced Bach fugues and stitched worsted saints into canvas.

On a certain brilliant June day, Claire's captivity came to an end. Her aunt fluttered into the dim convent parlor; she wore a radiant smile; she announced to the Mother Superior she was about to take "her dear niece to St. Rock, for the summer."

"She has found some one. 'And I am to be shown off!'" was Claire's inspired interpretation of this momentous action; and she laid aside her black gown and her blue ribbon, with its silver medal, with a demure smile.

The mere fact of the ancestral château of St. Rock

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being opened, was in itself, revealing; such an act of extravagance on the part of the duchess, announced portentous events. For two seasons, the great seat had been closed; it had not been visited since the marriage festivities of the duchess' only daughter—now the Marquise de Tourelles.

Claire gave me a most amusing account of her conversation with her aunt, as the two were seated, close together, on the straw chairs of the ascetic receiving room of the convent. "For you see, I knew quite well what all this wonderful change of programme meant. I was to be shown off. And, obviously, the gentleman in question was a most desirable *parti*. But I was not to be victimized. I told my aunt, quite frankly, I intended to make my choice myself. Unless the creature suited me, I should send him away, and quickly. He had better buy a return ticket! But although I talked so bravely, I determined to accept anything—old or even crippled—rather than return to that prison of a convent. How I danced, first on one foot and then on the other, on my trunk trays, for pure joy, when I reached my room!"

Carola, at this point of my tale, sat bolt upright. She faced me, with dancing eyes. "Your Claire is a perfect dear! I shall adore her. And now go on—

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and make it long—why don't the novelists give us such darlings, instead of the usual frail lady?"

"Some of them do—and as a reward for their presentment, are relegated to 'la bibliotheque rose'—to be read by the young, and rather than have that shame, a French writer would prefer not to be read at all!"

Carola's muslins shook, as she nestled herself back into the bright sands. With her hands beneath her head, to soften her hard pillow, and her eyes fixed on the sea, she plead anew for the next chapter in Madame de Montel's history.

The opening scene is in the great park of the St. Rock estate, in Brittany. In this park there is a wide circle of trees. These shade the schooling course. In this ring, generations of St. Rocks' have taken their first lesson as equestrians.

Powdered grandames, in monster headgear, have spread their brocades on the benches set above the course, beneath the tall sycamores. The artificial allées, with their avenues of clipped yews, the formal French gardens that stretched out, in interminable distance, below the elevation on which the rider's ring has been set, made a more fitting frame for those elaborately gowned court ladies than for most of their descendants.

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The Duchess de St. Rock, however, can fill and ornament, in superb fashion, any scene.

One might have imagined her holding court, on a certain blue June day. She had come down to see Claire "perform impossible feats." This, she had laughingly said, in an aside, to some of us—her guests, who were in her wake.

Close to the bridle path, above the greensward, a number of chairs had been placed. In the most commodious of these, one stuffed full of pillows against which the duchess would have considered it a crime to have leant, she seated herself. Though neither rouged, nor clad in voluminous brocades, wearing her own white hair, the duchess need not have feared comparison with any one of her stately predecessors. The haughty features and her still brilliant eyes were made the more effective by the soft laces, on which the pearl and diamond ornaments rested, with careless effect. The rich black satin costumed a shape whose former symmetry could still be guessed, from the ease of her carriage.

Behind her chair stood the abbé Latour. In this open-air scene, Monsieur l'abbé recalled his prototypes—the worldly sons of the church who idled away their days and nights, in the salons of court favorites and of grandes dames, centuries ago.

Just such a rubicund, suave, discreetly worldly

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face one might have met at the gaming tables of a Dubarry, or, oftener still, at the brilliant gatherings of Madame Vigée Le Brun. Like his counterpart, l'abbé Delille, of anecdotal fame, this smiling modern son of the church merited, rather than the sobriquet of *Chose Légère*, a genuine title or medal of some sort.

Many men gain approval and even distinction for personal achievements, for heroism; why should not the world have devised some recompense, some fitting reward for those who reproduce for us a vanished epoch? L'abbé Latour, in whatever scene or assembly he might be found, brings to mind the charm of the life lived in the XVIII Century. He seems to disseminate the perfume of a lost art, the amiable art of pleasing. He possesses the tact of saying simple things with an air of paying one a delicate compliment; he has that perfect courtesy which is the flower of good taste. He communicates to every festivity an all but lost flavor of enjoyment, an epicurean knowledge of how to extract the most amusement out of the hour, or even the moment. An English or an American convert, now and again, proves to Rome his zeal as a churchman; and the day, or evening, that the abbé's pockets are empty of cards and Bridge tablets would be those not marked in the calendar.

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The duchess considers him an invaluable asset. Frequenting, as he does, the worlds that crowd the Quartiers des Etrangers, circling about the Arch de L'Etoile, as well as those of the best French houses, her grace finds in him the most authentic inventory of all the new people and the new fortunes, that every social leader must, now-a-days, at least, know something about, even though the door of their own salon be closed to them.

On this occasion, the most that was demanded of the abbé, apparently, was to make a decorative background. Realizing perfectly the rôle he was expected to play, he stood at exactly the right distance, I noticed, behind the duchess's chair.

A group of ladies, with their husbands, their sons and young daughters, had come from the neighboring châteaux; this group was clustered about the duchess and the abbé. All eyes were centered on the figure of Mademoiselle de La Grange. She was mounted on a spirited steed. Round and round the course the animal ran, curvetting, wheeling, tossing its bright mane, dashing along, in sudden spurts of speed. Hurdles were set at certain distances about the ring, but these Claire was avoiding.

"She is getting him well in hand, first," observed one of the gentlemen, with admiring warmth.

"Suppose the creature refuses, will take none of

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those hurdles—what then?” uneasily queried the duchess. She wished, she added, the performance was over; she longed for the end of the show all the more, since the afternoon’s entertainment had been planned with a single object in view—and should any harm come to Claire! Somewhere concealed in her moral make-up, the duchess had a rudimentary heart, for as she voiced her concern for the results of the girl’s equestrian display, her voice perceptibly trembled.

The observant abbé saw the delicate moisture. He was quick to soothe, with his suave accent.

“Why should you be uneasy, Duchess? Mademoiselle Claire has a seat many a cavalry officer might envy. And on such a perfect animal as that Irish hunter!”

His words were cut in two by Claire’s imperious cry “Now, Tip!” With a loose rein, her body bent over the horse’s stretched neck, and the plunge forward was taken. The girl and her hunter flew over the first hurdle, with the ease of long practice.

“Bravo! Bravo!” burst from the group of on-lookers. The duchess clapped her white hands, and her faint color, I noticed, came back. “Must she take all those hurdles—all four?” she cried, in doubtful joy.

“She will do them beautifully—you will see.”

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This was said by our friend the Marquis de Penne-depie. He had come down with us, to pass a few days with his old friend the duchess.

The Marquis presently moved onwards, toward the ring. "Will you join me?" he queried, turning to me. "We shall really see her jump—and best calculate the height of her spring—from below." As we walked slowly along, he had a rare impulse of confidence: he confessed to being himself extraordinarily affected by Claire's appearance.

This fearless young creature, with her cool handling of her steed, her admirable seat, and her spirited beauty, brought to mind, he told me afterwards, another such lovely being, another such a scene. Long years ago, in his lost youth, the girl he had loved he had seen thus, mounted on a splendid hunter. She had ridden away from him; she had passed into the arms of one old enough to be her father—because he, useless, idle young fool that he was, had had no adequate *dot* to bring to the marriage settlement.

The Marquis, I perceived, stood looking at Claire with a special tenderness; his old eyes brightened as he noted the girl's mastery of her beast, as he looked at the quiet power in her steadfast eyes. "Will she too be sacrificed, by her ambitious aunt, to a great marriage, to the wearer of a grand title? Poor

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child! Poor all of us!" For a second, as I stood beside him I noted a mist other than that shed upon the scene by the tender, reluctant sunshine of the Breton skies.

Claire, meanwhile, was resting. With slack rein she was bending over Tip, her freed hand stroking his brown coat.

The horse suddenly pricked up his ears. The clickety-click of hoofs, striking the gravel of the long avenue, the one leading from the distant gate-entrance to the château, came nearer and ever nearer. Our faces were turned towards the perron. Two gentlemen were soon visible; they were making their leisurely way towards the steps.

For an instant, the group of guests assembled stared, and stood, or sat silent. The duchess presently said, softly, to the abbé, "Ask the Duc and his nephew to come out to us here, will you, please?"

The abbé's cassock was immediately describing those curves made by a stout frame walking rapidly in a narrow garment. He was across the lawn, beyond the paths of the French garden, below the terrace, and at the château steps in time to greet the two gentlemen as they slid from their horses.

Claire, meanwhile, watched the receding figure of her friend the abbé, with interest. Her eyebrows went up, in the way they had when she was asking

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questions. "And who can these gentlemen be? And why does aunt pay them such particular attention? Ah—I recognize the Duc, but the younger one—is a newcomer. Let us see the end of this," she murmured, as I stood beside her. Outwardly, she presented no change in her pose. She was still flipping her handkerchief across her face, and readjusting reins and stock, as though meditating an immediate dash about the ring.

Meanwhile, the two arrivals had had time to greet their hostess, to salute those known to them, and to be presented to those unknown. The duchess I saw was now rising from her seat. On her cheeks was a faded bloom.

"Ah-h," Claire said softly with a twinkle in her eyes, and she took pains to bend over her saddle and to take to caressing "Tip" as though wholly occupied with this tender act, "I see, the young one is the nephew. This is doubtless the new pearl. And now we will see which of us two will be made to go through their paces."

Our laughter was checked by the appearance of the duchess and her two visitors.

The somewhat withered old gentleman, with the kindly face and his head to one side, thought doubtless, as well as the younger man—whose brown eyes were the browner and softer, as his oval-shaped face

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seemed the more appealingly gentle by forces of contrast with his rough corduroys and dark green velvet jacket,—Mademoiselle de La Grange's charming smile was a smile of pleased, shy welcome.

Claire certainly looked, as she bowed over her saddle, the image of well-bred, youthful conventionality. The girl had now wheeled close to the outer edge of the ring. She had brought "Tip" to a stand, as the old duke came up. Him she had met, both in Paris and here at St. Rock, he having latterly paid her aunt numerous visits.

"Bon jour, Mademoiselle, and so you are good enough to show us how the English ride?" smiled up the elderly gentleman, fondling the ungloved hand Claire had quickly let drop into the outstretched palm.

"Oh, Duc, the performance is over. I was just about to turn in——" Claire said, over her reins, as she bent downwards.

"Claire, let me present the Comte de Montel," interrupted her aunt, designating the younger man.

"And my nephew, chère Mademoiselle. And for a nephew, not a bad one," added the duke, with unmistakable warmth.

"You come well recommended, Monsieur. Your uncle, as I have occasion to know, is not easy to please."

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Even the duchess showed her approval of this spirited reply. Claire's apparent perfect ease was softened to girlish roguishness by the bright blush that crimsoned her cheek. The blush saved everything; it made Claire prettier than ever; it proved to the duke that the girl's fond aunt had not exaggerated Mademoiselle's cleverness or her perfect training; and to his nephew, Claire's flushed face was proof of her possessing sensibility, as well as wit. Claire, for once, had managed to please everyone.

"The Duc would be glad to see you jump," was Madame de St. Rock's semi-command.

"Suppose we take a try together, at the hurdles, Monsieur," Claire said, turning to the young man now beside her horse; he, too, was stroking the brown coat. "It would be amusing, *à deux*. And alone, I confess, I am afraid I might fluke. Would your horse be too tired?"

Her aunt gasped a little at this audacious proposal. But she managed to urge, "Capital idea, that—it will be quite exciting, unless, Monsieur, you are too weary."

"Not at all," gayly responded the count. His face signalled the delight the invitation brought. "I shall be only too flattered, only too pleased. I'll be in the saddle in an instant."

The count was as good as his word. His horse

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was fresh; and the two presently cleared the space between the roadway and the schooling course.

The count brought his animal close beside Claire. The next moment they were off. Together they flashed over the first hurdle. The duke's nephew rode well, was, indeed, evidently used to hard riding, for he put Claire's animal to a smart canter.

The young people's exploit was rewarded by several salvos of applause. As the two were pulling up, Claire turned, and said in what she meant, with intention, to make her most independent manner,

"You took the last hurdle too high."

The count threw back his head with a short, pleased laugh. "You noticed that? That is 'la haute école' you know—it is sometimes amusing to practice its methods."

Claire was obviously disconcerted. She had hoped he would be annoyed. He had, certainly, quite perfect manners. He was undeniably, rather nice. She had already admitted his good looks. She decided to change her tactics.

"Wouldn't you enjoy a real gallop—on a real, clear road? I am so tired of going round and round."

Claire sent an appealing look into her large gray eyes. When that young lady chose to give a man the soft, semi-tender, wholly feminine expression of

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which her eyes were dramatically capable, hardened indeed must be the masculine sensibility that could resist her.

The count proved the effect Claire's telling glance produced, by a quick flash. But he merely said, quietly, "Indeed, you honor me greatly."

Claire nodded, absently; her mind was apparently intent on watching the shock she was about to give her aunt. She held up her stock to a groom, gave her order in a few words, and, as he flew towards the duchess, Claire said, in a meek voice, the voice of *la jeune fille à marier*—"Perhaps my aunt will not be willing."

This docility, in such contrast to her daring, completed, I could see, Henri de Montel's capture. He sat gazing up at her with a look of dawning adoration. Claire's expression was that of a model young girl, who is in the presence of a beautiful person who, possibly, if she be sufficiently acceptable, may be induced to propose. Claire's facial play, in later years, has been frequently likened, in amateur actors' circles, to Bartet's, and in de Musset's "*Il Faut qu'une Porte Soit Ouverte ou Fermée*" Madame de Montel has little to fear from the comparison.

Well, the two were soon out on the road. I watched them, first walking their horses, and then spurring them to a quick gallop. Soon their silhouettes were



A BRETON PEASANT



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lost; the great branches of the spreading oaks hid them from view.

The Marquis and I followed a tempting path toward the sea. "What do you think," I asked, with eager interest, "Will the duchess pull it off—this time?"

"Dear lady—for the first time in her life, the poor duchess has met her match. No one, not even a regiment of aunts, can, I firmly believe, force Claire to marry—until she herself decides the great question. 'At least,' he added with a sly touch of malice, "that is what I am hoping. Otherwise—that young lady will surely jump out of the matrimonial traces——" and now his eyes were once more on the two equestrians, advancing towards us. For they had not, of course, gone outside of the grounds.

What a time and a season for mating! Here were all the poetry and the melancholy charm of the Breton landscape. A bird sang to its mate in among the overgrown hedges; the low scrub-oak, the wild grasses, the ragged fields, the lean, small cattle and the mouse-colored roofs of the cottages were set against the deep, intensely blue sea, and the distant, carmine-tinted sails.

It made a charming picture. 'A single human figure focused the eyes—a woman whose wide-winged cap and coiffe, I remember, made intense

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spots of white against the pale horizon. The motionless Breton peasant, in her monastic black gown, and her fixed, tragic gaze, intently watching the drifting sails, seemed somehow curiously symbolic—a rustic figure of fate, watching, impassively, the setting forth of human hopes, upon the great ocean of infinity.

The young count talked as he rode, gallantly. It had all but angered Claire to discover she could find no perceptible weakness, no fault or blemish which she could, later, use as a target for ridicule, when the time came to reject or to accept him.

During the next few days, the count continued his discreet, his courteous wooing. Although the two were never alone, after this one ride, yet each considered they had gained a clear, profound knowledge of the other's nature and character. There were the long games of tennis, dancing together at the cotillons given in the neighboring châteaux, and, above all, the eloquence of that language young eyes speak, that gives a meaning to the simplest phrases.

Claire's fate was actually sealed one moonlight night. The duke and his nephew had ridden over for dinner. After the ladies had left the table, the duchess put her arm about Claire. The two passed into the salon.

"Dear child," Madame de St. Rock had begun in

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a moved voice, "The Duc has come to ask for your hand. Henri is very much in love——"

"Is he? He never misses a ball, at tennis," Claire replied coolly. She had slipped out of her aunt's arm that she might sit on a low seat and face her, deliberately.

"Claire!" protested Madame de St. Rock. "Can you never be serious—even at such a moment?"

"I never was more serious in my life," and Claire drew a long, grave face.

"Then you consent—you will make us all happy?"

"I really can't begin at my age, by committing bigamy. I can't marry both the Duc and his nephew——" the girl had wickedly interrupted.

Her aunt for once, forgot to administer a reproof for so shocking a word as "bigamy" on a young girl's lips. She clasped Claire to her. "You are a darling!" She exulted. For she knew her niece would accept no suitor in more direct fashion.

The betrothal had promptly followed. All the neighborhood, as well as a special train-load of relatives and friends from Paris, came for the signing of the *contract de marriage*.

There appeared to be but one cloud in the blue. A few days after the ceremony, the troubled count sought the duchess, in her boudoir. "You wish to

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see me, dear Henri? There is something you desire to say?" she had gently queried. She was beginning to be genuinely fond of this quiet, reserved nephew-to-be. As the future heir of his enormously wealthy uncle, he was, of course, doubly dear—and estimable.

With a candor which was the more alarming, from so reserved a nature, the soon-to-be-bridegroom blurted out, "Dear Duchess, Claire, as you know, is the most charming, the most adorable of young girls. But, do you think she has much heart?"

The duchess all but collapsed. Neither in the *contract de marriage*, nor in the duke's proposal, had there been the remotest mention of that organ, or of its quick or slow action; how could one think of such a detail, when all the more important matters of settlement had been agreed upon?

"Heart—dear Henri! Claire is all heart!" came at last, inspiringly, out of the chaos of the poor duchess's bewildered brain.

"Is she?" somewhat dryly replied Claire's fiancé. "Then she has a great talent for concealing her feelings. When I ask her if she loves me—she will not even answer."

The duchess by this time, it appears, had marshalled her ready wits. "What a dear, provoking creature she is! The very spirit of contradiction—

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such is our Claire! Of one thing you may be, however, quite certain. Unless she liked you, and enormously, she would not now be trying on her wedding gown. She is there——” The duchess lifted an impressive hand, to the adjoining room. “Doucet’s best fitter came down!” And her grace gave the doubting groom-elect a triumphant look.

With this sense of his betrothed being actually in the hands of Parisian experts in millinery, behind the doors on which he was free to glue his eyes, Monsieur de Montel felt himself forced to accept the situation as a sufficiently reassuring answer.

Later, in the French garden, where he stood awaiting Claire for a tennis match, the young man soothed his still perturbed state of mind, with the comforting reflection,

“Well—we shall see. *Nous verrons*. It is true that in most marriages, love, if it comes at all, comes after the Mayor has put on his sash!”

A month later, the red and white awnings were erected in front of St. Clothilde, in Paris. Claire drove up with her aunt, in the stately ducal landau. An hour later, she descended the long aisle, to sweep her point lace train to the open door of her own automobile. Once the door closed, and her young husband and herself screened from the staring eyes

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of on-lookers, Claire pretended to be wholly taken up with adjusting her veil. But as the car moved off, and the chauffeur increased his speed, Claire turned to Henri, to the man to whom she had just made the most solemn of vows.

"You may kiss me, now, Henri," she said, caressingly, and she lifted her lips.

But her husband, though all his soul was in his eyes, held her, she told me, for a moment, away. "Not until you tell me you love me, Claire." For in his bride's answer Henri felt there lay all the promise of their future.

Claire nestled in his arm. "As if, from that first ride—I hadn't, you goose!"

"For you see, when he wouldn't kiss me, even then, when the priest had made us husband and wife, I saw I had to obey, and of course, it was then I really loved him!" she wrote, from Lugano, this delightful ending to her courtship.

Claire's marriage has been a pronounced success. To all appearances, the young couple have been carried along on the fleet wings of happiness.

Comte de Montel, as much in love with his wife as is consistent with the traditions of his caste, is passionately in love with her physical beauty and charm, and gaily indulgent to her innumerable

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caprices, as he has termed each new departure from the conventional Faubourg routine. It is certain Claire's fertile inventions for breaking away from dulness and her courage in creating new and enlivening situations, as well as her delight in perpetual motion have kept her husband too busy for even a longing for distractions of a purely personal nature.

"If it is distractions you need, you dear, old, silly lover of novelty—*Bien*—it is I who can be counted upon to furnish them," she would say to him.

Fêtes and festivities have succeeded each other with kaleidoscopic rapidity. No sooner settled in their new apartment, than Claire proceeded to exercise her talents for taking a seat, and the most expensive seat in the "train de luxe." No speed was rapid enough, every waking moment being made to yield its fullest quota of enjoyment. Paris alone could have supplied the variety of continuous performances this child of her century insisted upon, as her rightful due. Claire not only understood the art of burning the social candle at both ends, but she invented the still more ingenious, if self-destructive method of cutting the proverbial candle in two and thus securing a quadruple illumination. No day or night had hours enough for the round of Claire's multiform and multitudinous engagements, for all

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the charities, dances, bridge-parties, dinners, motor trips and balloon ascensions. She was not only in the "movement," she precipitated motion, carrying her world along with her, in the irresistible swing of her momentum.

What mattered it if half of this world that was so entirely in the movement was really no "world" at all, if judged from the rigid standards of the worn-out Faubourg traditions? The de Montels saw almost as many Americans, English, and Russians as they did the young set of their own world.

From the duchess's conventional standpoint, Claire and her husband are, however, on the road to social ruin. When she learned, to her indignant amazement, that besides Americans and other foreigners, Claire had actually not only received, but had even dined the newest, decadent artists and writers; that she had boasted, as though she considered the mistaken condescension an honor, of having had B——, the famous actress, to dinner, the poor duchess collapsed.

"It is become a house of perdition—yours—my poor Claire!" she ejaculated, between her gasps of angry protest.

Claire smiled divinely. A divine little demon on the road to perdition, at that moment, she must have looked, in her severe Empire violet velvet, that

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showed every line of her supple shape. Beneath the monster hat of the day with its fall of drooping plumes, the clear-cut features, with their bewitching play of expressive changeableness, seemed small and child-like. The bubbling laughter broke, as Claire answered; she spoke in the patient tone one uses to children, or to the very old, whose foibles one must humor.

"Dear Aunt, *maison de perdition si tu vent*—But, at least remember! I keep my husband at home! He is not—as yet—running after false goddesses, nor ruining you and me at baccarat. *Allons*—give me some credit. In amusing myself, I amuse him. 'And when a man is amused, his wings are clipped!'"

The duchess smiled, in spite of her accumulated store of traditions.

"To amuse yourself and Henri, is it necessary to see all these foreigners, all these Protestants? And Brévot—and Quérin" (naming two of the most famous of the modern French school of symbolists) "how can receiving such as these conduce to your entertainment? These men are men of talent—Quérin has more, I grant you. But they are not of our world—they are not——"

"Born—you are about to say. I grant you they have not had to rise superior to the benumbing effects of rank. Yes—don't cry out—benumbing is

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the word. Had they been '*des nôtres*' they would have been mediocrities!"

"Mediocrities! Do you call the Marquis de Vaugirard a mediocrity—or the Vicomte des Allonges?"

"They have written pretty books, dear aunt, but they are not great men. They will never do anything to merit their seat in the Académie. Their immortality dies with them. And as for the Americans—they are charming, many of them. They are always amusing. And they possess one inestimable quality."

"I should like to know it," snuffed the contemptuous duchess.

"They are hospitable—and generous. They will always ask one ten times to our once. To frequent Americans is to practice a wise economy. One never knows when they may be useful, or necessary. I may have a son or a daughter to marry," and Claire's lips curved upwards, in a roguish smile. "If I am a mother, and cease to amuse Henri, he may ruin us yet—between *ces petites dames* and baccarat."

The duchess could not take time to smile. The moment was too fraught with excitement. She bent forward; she placed trembling hands on Claire's huge chinchilla muff.

"Oh, my child, it is so? Is it, indeed?"

Claire extricated a hand from the laces lining her

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muff. With a pretty gesture she laid her gloved finger on her aunt's wrinkled hand. "Chère, there will be no more balls for me—till the Spring. Then, I shall make up for——"

Claire never finished the sentence. For the duchess, being a large body, had to be firmly handled. Her sudden descent upon Claire's furs and laces demanded effective resistance. The latter held her sobbing aunt sternly away—safely away from the costly chinchillas. Yet Claire's own voice half broke—as she cooed:

"*Allons—allons*—how do we know it will be a boy?"

Nothing has been changed in "the house of perdition" by the birth of a son and heir. Claire, once completely restored to health, proceeded to organize the nursery and its relation to her own life with due regard to both her duty to her child, and her duty to herself. She is the society mother *plus* the conscience developed, in even worldly modern mothers, through the gentle, scientific rule of the trained nurse. The presiding genius of the nursery is "Mees"—Miss Talbot. The purely material wants of the young Henri are ministered to by a *nounou* of opulent frame, resplendent, in the Tuileries or the Bois, in her crown of ribbon and her voluminous nurse's cloak.

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To Claire, the little Henri is brought two or three times a day; he is tossed about, kissed, petted, cooed and sung to, in the melodious French baby tongue. His physical condition is rigidly, even scientifically watched.

It is rather the count, than Claire, whose whole life and inner state has been changed by the birth of his son.

Paternity has gripped him with bands stronger than steel. He is such a father as only France can produce—a father with the anxious, physical yearnings of a young mother. He would have been entirely content to drop out of the “movement”; his one interest is centered in the nursery; to follow the perambulator, is mild rapture; to wheel it, had he been but a *bourgeois* would have been ecstasy. But *noblesse oblige*. He, therefore, contents himself with making imaginary engagements. He excuses himself to Claire, meeting as though by accident, his adored one, in Paris, under the green alleés of the Bois; and, at Deauville, he makes secret appointments with “Mees,” and the boy at the dunes.

Chapter XIV

A DINNER AT DEAUVILLE

At this point in my tale, we heard the Manoir bell ringing for the noon meal. There was barely time for even brief comment, some early arrivals for breakfast having made their appearance.

Two days later we were running over to Deauville. Carola was called for at Trouville, and we were at the de Montels' villa before the sun had dipped below the horizon.

As the car slowed down to enter the gate, leading to the house, a man's voice cried, close to the window, "Ah, Madame! how good of you to be so early ——" and then the count stopped short. He had caught sight of Carola.

Once the presentations made, our host gave an expressive gesture as he swept his free hand across the gray tweed suit he still wore. "As you perceive—it is I who am late—I have been down at the dunes—with bébé." Then, with brightened eye, the count still kept his hand on the door, to say: "You will be able to see him. The nurse is only ten steps behind—excuse me—I must rush off, to change——"

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Claire burst out laughing, as he whirled across the lawn. "If you hadn't given me his portrait, beforehand, I shouldn't have believed my own eyes and ears."

Madame de Montel we found awaiting us. She welcomed Claire with the graceful French cordiality, and then led us to the little retiring-room. Once our wraps removed, she gave Carola a rapid, investigatory glance, as she said—"Do sit down. It is cool out here—and we have time enough to be in doors—when dinner is announced. And how good of you to come early! Now there is time to tell you all about the menagerie you are asked to meet before they appear."

The two young women continued to look at each other. What they said, in the few moments that passed before the arrival of the other guests, was far less important than the more expressive impression conveyed by their veiled, but none the less penetrating glances. Claire's eyes were more than commonly betraying. "Your friend is adorable—she is far more beautiful than I had imagined," was what her fixed eloquent gaze conveyed—and this was what she whispered, a few seconds later, as she passed me to call the nurse, "For really, you must see my boy," she said aloud, to Carola.

Against the black and white timbered façade of

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her Normandy châlet, Claire made just then an effective picture. Her height was the height of her tall, shapely race; the browns of her hair and eyes, the clear pallor of her skin were well set-off by the stripes of her Normandy background. Her features were those you study in Petitot's miniatures; but, in lieu of flowing curls, and the voluminous outlines of the great period, Claire was a Louis XIV aristocrat draped by Doucet, and wrought upon by twentieth century influences.

The severe figure of the English nurse now appeared, wheeling the young Henri.

"Bring him to me, Talbot," Claire commanded, in her clear, correct English. She held out her bared arms. She ignored the tyranny of her elaborate chiffon gown to snatch up the equally elaborately gowned Henri. She kissed the child. She handed him first to me and then to Carola, but all the time with an eye on the road-way. Then she tossed him to the waiting nurse presently with, "There are the Swan-Edgars. Take him away, Talbot."

The first of the "menagerie" had, indeed, arrived.

At Deauville, at the Villa des Dunes, as in Paris, Claire continued to practise her mania for gathering people together from the "four corners of the

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world." In less skillful hands her house might have degenerated into a genuine storm center. But Claire's inherited talents, as *maitresse de Salon*, now had full play for development; the great-great-grand-daughter of a "Précieuse" of the famous de Rambouillet set, and a grand-daughter of the brilliant countesse de Centose—whose wit had won her fame even among the Récamier circle—Claire's tact and her charm were the more effective for having been of long transmission.

The elements assembled for the Bridge-dinner, on this soft August night, were, to say the least, heterogeneous. Beside some Americans, there were several representatives of the social forces at war throughout France. There was the old Duc de Ventour, our host's uncle, who could not hear the present government mentioned without giving alarming symptoms of an apoplectic fit; there was the youngest Senator who sat in those "rocking chairs of indolence—and impotence" as the savage duke paraphrased the nation's Senate—who, though "born" and of the right Norman ancestry—his name figuring on the walls of the Dives church among the Conqueror's followers—yet had had the audacity to take his seat as a Progressive Liberal. There was the lovely young Marquise de Baisemains, whose divorce and re-marriage were still an unset-

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tled matter of bitter controversy—since she came of a family of devout Catholics. Having re-married, she had of course only been married civilly—therefore hers was no marriage at all. Living thus, and openly in illegal union, unblessed by the Church, in the eyes of her own world, she was a social pariah. Yet here she was, and being here, could not be wholly ignored. The Duchesse de St. Rock, who for the “*grande semaine*,” was with her niece, gave the Marquise two fingers.

When Carola had been led before the duchess, the latter lady had first examined her through her lorgnon, but with a sufficiently gracious smile, and then, as the result of her impressions, had offered her hand.

Claire stood for a few moments, to answer the courteous questions, but immediately retreated under cover of the next arrival's appearance. To be scrutinized, thus openly, was not a supportable infliction—not for a Marlborough of Beacon Street. Carola stiffened, with the air of an offended queen.

The famous tenor de Redzaw, now entered the room; his carriage, manner and smile alone remained as the sole reminders of his kingship of the stage—his voice having gone, some time since, to its own pathetic funeral. There were the Swan-Edgars, the early arrivals, who went everywhere, carrying with

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them the tragic history of their double divorce, in London and Paris—but who still found society's doors closed to them in Boston and New York. And there were the de Brezés and the de Bonneville's who may be said, like happy nations, to have had no history. Both couples could contribute to the insatiable hunger of their world for gossip, nothing more spicy than the two years' old episode of the young Vicomte de Brezé's having been ruined at baccarat, one night at the Jockey Club. It had taken the whole fortune of his mother, half that of an uncle and a remote aunt to rescue him from disgrace. The social train, however, was still kept up by his wife's *dot*, parsimoniously administered by her far-seeing father's hands. The de Bonneville's having been married but a year, had scarcely had time to make dramatic history.

Last, but by far the most interesting guest to arrive, was Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale. Carola, I was glad to find, could command her color; she managed to maintain her roses at their stable pink, although she must have been conscious of the immediate raising of the duchess's gold lorgnon. She bore that searching glance, as well as her hostess's smiling, somewhat amused, and obviously indulgent gaze with delightful imperturbability. She smiled down upon her admirer, as he bent to kiss her hand,

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with the smile of a woman who had seen a long procession of adoring males thus bending before her. She turned, to continue her talk with the old duc.

This quiet pose of a perfect self-possession, won immediate praise from Claire.

"Madame Marlborough has distinction," she whispered. Even the duchess had to nod, admiringly, as she talked to her cousin, the Baron, the four eyes being fixed on the American guest. The Baron was at no pains whatever to make known his state of mind. He walked directly over to Carola's side, once he had saluted the ladies, and at her side he remained.

Claire seated her guests with her accustomed skill. Her aunt could talk "traditions" to the old duke de Ventour, and together, over the succulent viands, they could forecast the coming doom of France; the youthful French Senator was paired off with Mrs. Swan-Edgar, that his liberal views might not shock sensitive French ears. The great tenor was seated between the American lady and young, timid Madame de Brezé, who having never recovered from the shock of her husband's disgrace at the gaming table, practised a most Christian social leniency—which proved her not so dull as she looked. The Marquise de Baisemains found herself next to Mr. Swan-Edgar, whose French was all but unintelligible, but

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whose appreciation, at taking in a Marchioness, needed no medium of language. Claire had reserved for her own distraction, as a counterpoise to the duke, the young Vicomte de Brezé, whose audacities at play excited her imagination. Carola and Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale were seated side by side.

The dinner went, as dinners go all over the dining world, in well-bred circles. The de Montels' chef made the clash of over-violent opinions impossible. The iced champagne cooled lips that purred amiably. The evening glow, in the distant west, lent a softening hue to faces that wore the placid, and somewhat flaccid expression of men who were dining agreeably, after a pleasant day. Bathing, smoking, sauntering, an afternoon of tough polo had relaxed the limbs and muscles of the younger men.

The women, even the doubly-divorced American, wore the suave look Nattier delighted to give to high-born dames—the look whose composed serenity, with its engaging air of wishing to please, obliterated all traces of tragic experience.

It was only after the bridge-tables had been set out, and the customary silence had settled down upon the players, that conversation, in the true sense of the word, may be said to have been resorted to,—among the non-players. This small circle was left to settle themselves—and their views—in the deep-

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cushioned armchairs of the piazza. Only a handful of us remained to look out into the night. The old duke, who found bridge dull, after a half century of the gaming tables;—the young senator, who was still at the serious age when cards are considered a waste of time;—and the duchess, whose back to the tables was her ineffectual protest against a game that was the game of parvenues, of “arrivistes”—“that opened the door to all the world one ought to keep out,”—these composed our little group.

The battle of tongues was begun by the duchess, on this very topic of bridge. She sat uncompromisingly erect, in a high-backed chair innocent of cushions. The moonlight softened the severe lines of her face. But the duchess’s voice was the voice of her caste. She addressed herself exclusively to the duke:—as though he alone were of the rank to hear her golden speech.

“My dear Duc—you reproach me with my dislike for bridge. It is more than a dislike. It is a zealous hate—the zeal and hatred one should exercise, I take it, towards all things that are in themselves harmful—pernicious.”

“But is bridge really so harmful?” the senator ventured to suggest, with the polite aggressiveness of a man whose own ancestral rank and whose advanced opinions made this ducal ignoring insupport-

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able. He was also red-haired, and what red-haired man sits dumb, in any circle or assembly?

The duchess turned a sharpened face on the advanced young politician. "Not only harmful—Monsieur—but dangerous—most dangerous. It has infected all our young women with the spirit of gambling. It was bad enough to have our sons disgrace themselves at baccarat and ruin their houses—but now their wives are copying them."

"The young Duchesse d'Herault, it seems, on the contrary, boasts that she makes an income by her play," placidly ejaculated the duke, flipping the ashes indolently off his half-smoked cigar.

The duchess clapped full armor on. "Yes—and on her day, has not time to give you even a half finger. She also boasts she never lost a rubber, though fifty people came to call. Why should she—she tosses you a nod! There are manners for you! To such a point of insolence has bridge" (and here a comedy actress of the Français might have caught a new note of vitriolic irony from the duchess's tone) "to such a point of insolence has bridge brought the young women of our day. But then—what can one expect? My nephew married an American."

There was a silence that was somewhat trying to all but the speaker. As the one American present, I felt it necessary to protest. "Surely, Madame, it

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is not only Americans who have set the fashion, in bad manners, in our century. I went to the young Comtesse de Rougecourt's last winter, on her day. I was received by her butler, who asked if I would pass into the *salle* and take a cup of tea, as Madame la Comtesse could not be interrupted, as long as the game was on! At least, our American duchess had preserved the shadow of hospitable instinct—she gives one a half finger and a nod! As yet she has not promoted a butler to the position of grand chamberlain."

The gentlemen were good enough to laugh. The duchess condescended to smile. "Well, my dear" (this great lady only turned to cream when she found herself beaten), "I presume you are right—our young women are losing their manners, all over the world. But I have heard even you say, you yourself admit, that bridge is the great leveler, the open door through which everyone enters."

"Quite true. It is the pontoon bridge thrown across the most opposite social shores. It is, after all, is it not, the game of the age—the democratic game?"

"How true that is!" cried the red-haired senator. He struck an oratorical attitude, agitating his nervous hands. "The games, like the songs of a nation, reflect the life of the time. Why fight our

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century and its evident, its fatal movement, dear Duchess? Democracy had come—and it has come to be fought out as a principle, till its virtues or its non-workable theories are proven.”

Whether the “dear Duchess” from a mere provincial Vicomte’s son, of tainted political views, or the word “democracy,” were the red flag waved at the bullish principles of the irate, stiff-backed old lady, we who listened will never know. But the duchess de St. Rock grew purple with suppressed anger. She let perfect silence deliver her message of insolent ignoring. She turned to the duke, presently, and asked, in her most mellifluous tones:

“And your daughter, dear Duc,—what news do you hear from her?” We who were not addressed, were as far away as though suddenly transported to China.

But the duke was not to be thus caught in the lady’s trap for putting an enemy *hors du combat*. He civilly answered, his daughter sent him good news from Russia, and then he turned to the perfectly self-possessed, even amused young democratic vicomte.

“You are right, I presume—Monsieur—the dangerous principles of Democracy and its twin, Socialism, must be fought out. All the signs of the times point to the collapse of law and order—to

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the vanishing of the old régime, with its monarchical ideals, with its traditions of reverence, its lofty ideals of heroism and religious obedience. But what are the substitutes? Murderers now go unpunished; apaches parade the streets, and French soldiers insult their flag. Are these the evidences of the so-called progress of the people?"

The duchess's sigh and the sadness of her fine old face gave further emphasis to her wail. "We are doomed—we and France. There is nothing left to hope for—we are going the way of all great nations—our end is near."

The senator was on his feet, his excitable hands shaking above his head. The rich yellow light showed his mobile features aflame with power, with the passion of his convictions. "Is it possible that none of our world sees clearer than to prophesy such doom? That you are all content to accept despair? I say you, but I—and I am sure of what I say—I see, on the contrary, new forces at work, new, fresh energies at play. This irruption of the middle class into the political arena is not a bad thing. Our régime is played out; we died—all of us—on the scaffold with our ancestors. We have had temporary fits of resurrection, but, as a class, we have not really counted, for over a century. We have been cursed with the curse of inactivity. We

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have taken no lead—had no genius even for imitation.”

The time he took to reseal himself gave the old duke his cue.

“Quite true, all you say is true. We are not natural political leaders, like the English lords. But whose fault is it—but Napoleon and his accursed laws for equal distribution of property, laws that have impoverished us all.”

“And enriched the peasant,” interpolated the Senator.

“Exactly,” was the quick retort, “and so split up France that it is like unto a patchwork quilt.”

“And the most prosperous country in the world,” hotly added the politician. He went on glibly. “The prosperity of the people, their right to freedom, their release from tyranny, were the great legacies of the Revolution. Present-day agitations mark a period of transition—the full benefits of the Revolution are only beginning to be worked out. The great principles of humanitarianism—that cannot even yet be practiced, with impunity, by the people—the divine doctrine of the brotherhood of man have made men a little drunk.”

The duchess listened, as she might to the chant of a savage tribe. “Brotherhood of man,” “divine principles of the Revolution”—“humanitarianism”

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—what an absurd and incomprehensible jargon! There was but one way of freedom for men—and but one class of people really worth considering: let all men, great and small, learn their catechism, go to confession, hear mass every Sunday, and walk according to the holy light of the Catholic Church. The priests taught men to be Christians and patriots. The one divine right was the divine right of kings; and the one class, in France, in the whole world, for that matter, truly worth the consideration of kings, were those born under the shadow of the pale-faced houses of the right Faubourg. Beyond the narrow limits of those few holy streets the whole world, except the aristocracies of Austria, Spain, England and Russia, was *canaille*! The duchess's indignant voice sternly ejaculated the first four of these rules for the redemption of her country; the more intimate personal beliefs were hinted, with the added eloquence of glance and emphasis of disdainful gesture.

Cool as was the breeze coming up from the sea, the air was felt to be somewhat close. The rustle and flutter of some one moving towards us, from the long and open salon windows, brought an agreeable relief.

Our hostess stood before us. Her white tulle gown was blanched to the softness of down, under the moonbeams. The red-haired senator was on his

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feet on the instant. The old duke de Ventour took a relative's privilege—for Claire, in advancing, had extended one of her long hands, now as white as her costume, and the duke had captured it.

"Well, my child, and have you won or lost this evening?"

But Claire's clear, ringing voice was already questioning:

"And what have you poor things been doing? Quarreling—eh? Of course you have. That is why I placed you all together—so that the evening might seem short." The duke and the senator joined in her laughter.

"What have you in your hand?" dryly queried the duchess, who had not laughed.

Claire shook her winnings in her freed hand, making a merry jingle. "Gold, dear aunt, gold. The king that never dies—the one monarch that keeps his crown. *Allons, Napoleon, saute—toi!*" And she flipped a Louis in the white light of the moon-beam. "And you, too, Phrygian-capped Republic—up with you! See! They all dance, like the governments that dance and fall, they too. But the gold is there, all the same!"

On our drive homewards, half an hour later, this figure of Claire, one hand in that of the doting old

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duke's and the other tossing the bright gold into the night, struck me as suggestive, as symbolic. A painter might thus have typified Republican France, holding on, through inherited traditions, to old ways, old customs, yet, with prophetic foresight, heaping up the gold that has made France prosperous—the banker, not the spendthrift, among nations.



Chapter XV

THE PROPOSAL

THE very next afternoon the grating of carriage wheels on the gravel of the drive brought an ominous, sinking feeling. The sight of a victoria, the single trap of the de Pennedepie establishment, confirmed that premonitory shiver. Within the carriage, the little marquise was seated, her skirts spread wide on either side of her erect, stately figure. Her card, with the family coronet impressively visible, in bright blue lettering, announced, with sufficient emphasis, all the coming interview held in store.

"Madame de Pennedepie has come to ask for your hand, on behalf of her dear friend, the Baron de Gaspé-Royale!" When I saw the effect of this announcement on Carola, I felt some of my annoyance slipping from me.

Carola's face went from pink to crimson, and from scarlet to a tea-rose pallor. She seemed to be consumed with anger—as though at the betrayal of a trust, or of a secret that should have been sacredly guarded. "You say—you mean that Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale has sent that lady here,—to ask for my hand. . . ."

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Her emotion was quite genuine. She turned suddenly, and walked to the window. She did not seem to be able immediately to command her voice. Presently, she faced me, and the New England firmness—yes—and a very perceptible touch of the New England frost was in her tone, as she said, with an access of dignity, “He has no right to put me—and you, as well—in such a position. He understands perfectly——”

“Obviously that is just the point at issue between you. He does not understand. He has sent Madame de Pennedepie to clinch matters. Am I to refuse?”

The frost gave way to a confused melting of feeling. Carola had again mounted her flaming signals, as she stumbled over the words, “Oh-h, no-o! I don’t say that—I can’t go as far as that—not, at least, after last night——”

“Well, really, since it appears that I must pass a very uncomfortable quarter of an hour—would it were only that!—what am I to say?” I did not feel myself wholly stroked into good humor by Carola’s suddenly resorting to the caressive attitude; amid successive kisses, she whispered: “Oh—be good—be clever—just imagine it was you—yourself—and you didn’t know whether you really cared enough—or——”

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"Ah, I see—I am to leave the door on a hinge——" And with that I left her.

I found my guest seated in the inner salon. To this smaller room she had retreated, apparently, to ensure the greater privacy. Her immediate question on my entering was, "And can we be alone, dear lady?"

I assured her we would be quite undisturbed.

And then we sat down. For a long moment we looked into the other's eyes with the guarded expression of two adversaries, neither of whom proposed to be the first to open the coming contest. The only sound was the marquise's hurried breathing.

"The marquis is quite well, I hope," I sparred—for time.

"Quite well, thank you. 'And you—*chère dame*—all your household are well?" She, also, was not quite ready to begin the attack.

Happily, I could assure her all at the Manoir were in the best of health.

Then we both rested, on the comfortable conviction that, at least, the preliminaries had been conducted in perfect form.

During the pause I was enabled to take careful note of the infinite pains the little marquise had given to her toilet. 'As ambassadress, on as important a mission, this charming elderly lady had had

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a fitting sense of the formalities to be observed. Never had I seen the family laces and jewels as prodigally displayed. A changeable green silk gown, made in the fashion of at least ten years ago—yet a mode that suited the slender, erect figure infinitely better than the clinging, Directoire, over-revealing shape of our day—this toilet was set off by a large black lace hat. At the throat and wrists some priceless Venetian point made an effective note in the costume. On the lace jabot, there lay an old-fashioned pendant, its emeralds and pearls set in antique scroll-work. A coral-handled parasol, covered with Brussels lace, was carefully held in one cotton-gloved hand. With the point of this sunshade, the marquise was busily tracing the design in the rug that lay between us.

Finally, the great subject was broached.

Madame de Pennedepie lifted her head, with a certain air of resolution, as she asked, in a fluted voice, "And your charming friend, is she with you to-day?"

I admitted she was, for the happiness of us all, under our roof.

There came a slight pause; then, "I do not ask for her to-day—for—I come on a very delicate mission." And here the French grace that seems second nature to every woman born under the skies

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that have rained gifts on these charming women, came to the aid of this little ambassadress.

She put her parasol in a safe corner, and then Madame de Pennedepie moved her chair a few inches nearer; she laid her gloved hand on mine. She lifted a face in which tender pleading and a womanly sweetness made the ageing lines seem effaced.

"I am sure you have already divined the purpose of my coming. You must have seen the admiration your beautiful friend has aroused in our dear boy—in Baron de Gaspé-Royale. You see, we have known him so long—and for years he was such a near neighbor, at Tours—he seems almost like a son." The marquise took time to press her handkerchief to her lips.

It was the handkerchief of ceremonious occasions; the bit of fine batiste was yellow with age; and from the Honiton lace border, as she swept the relic across her lips, there was wafted the faint odor of jessamine.

During this pause, it would have been unkind to remind my visitor of a period, not so very long ago—a brief four weeks—to be accurate—when this parental love for Monsieur de Gaspé-Royale had suffered a temporary eclipse. This second matrimonial essay, apparently, had sufficed to revive, and

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even to increase the intensity of affection the Baron had aroused in this kindly lady's indulgent heart. Her fond smile proved all had been forgotten.

Again she drew her chair a little nearer. Once more her hand was laid on mine. The finely-lined face wore a tender, yet solemn, expression as she said: "I am sure you know what brings me—I am here to ask, as Gaston's emissary, for the hand of Madame Marlborough."

Now that the great fact of her mission was announced, there came a pregnant pause.

The marquise drew herself up to her tallest, above the cushions of the bergère. Through the glance that conveyed to me the immense honor such an avowal involved, I was quite certain I detected an irrepressible look of condescension.

As I still said nothing—and merely smiled, and waited—the marquise relinquished her pose. She bent forward; as though the statement were an afterthought, but one I might, being a foreigner—and who could fathom the curious mental and emotional habits of an American?—one I might consider a necessary qualification, she added, "Gaston is, I need not tell you, passionately in love with your lovely friend. As Emric says, he has, indeed, received his lightning stroke." Before she ended, there was real warmth in her tone; for no French-

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woman can talk of love without feeling the reflex action of the master emotion.

To this avowal, vicariously, of the Baron's sentiments regarding Carola, I was forced to admit I had noticed certain betraying signs.

The bergère was pushed nearer yet. Madame de Pennedepie lost her more or less remote air—to return to the familiar attitude common to our intercourse during the past year or more.

"And, my dear," she went on hurriedly, "of course you know what a great *parti* Gaston is—one of the greatest in France. I believe my husband has already given you his history. As for his family, and his title—there are none more distinguished, none more noble, in the true sense of the word, in Europe."

So eloquent had been the little marquise, in this her impassioned exposition of her friend's historical importance, that one seemed to hear the tramp of glorious armies, to see the gleam of intrepid Crusader's armor, and to follow the career of the long line of de Gaspé-Royale courtiers.

I hastened to assure my friend I knew something of these heroic deeds, from French history, as well as from her husband's account of the family exploits. My visitor gave an eloquent gesture.

"And does Madame Marlborough also interest

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herself in these histories?" was the quick questioning.

I was forced to admit Carola, also, was no stranger to these records of bravery.

The marquise was now so close to me she was almost upon my knees. "And—you think then she is interested—she is not indifferent to Gaston?"

"I think, dear lady, she likes your friend very much indeed, or else——"

Madame de Pennedepie closed with that: from her point of view, the great matter was as good as settled. She already saw the two at the altar. A joyous cry broke, as she lifted her delicately featured face, on which there had settled a triumphant expression.

"Then—you will give me hope—I can carry back to Gaston the good news that my mission has succeeded?" was the eager, yet taken-for-granted, tone.

"Alas! I can assure you of nothing!" And then it was that I gave the little lady one of the rudest shocks of her protected existence.

She took the shock rather badly—I must admit. Her color faded and then rose. I was quite positive the increased crimsoning was not wholly due to surprise.

The bergère was pushed back; there lay between us, again, the width of the rug. Across it Madame

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de Pennedepie was looking at me with haughty, condemnatory eyes.

"You say, dear lady, you are not sure—you cannot give me an assurance that, after accepting our friend's marked attentions—Madame Marlborough does not know her own mind?"

"You have stated the case with inclusive accuracy."

"Then—then your friend is a coquette—a——" The gentlewoman in Madame de Pennedepie refused to allow her the satisfaction of confessing her further contemptuous indignation.

"Not at all." I smiled, amiably, into the ruffled, dismayed countenance. "Mrs. Marlborough, on the contrary, is singularly sincere, amazingly honest. I say 'singularly' because of her remaining so simple, so unspoiled. You see, your friend the Baron is only one of some dozens who have laid siege to Carola's heart."

"Of course, she is beautiful," the marquise conceded, quickly, "and I presume"—there came a pregnant pause—"very rich." Though Madame de Pennedepie took to smoothing out her gown, and only looked up to give a single, rapid glance, in that glance, I read the crux of the situation had been touched.

Had the Baron sent his ambassadress on an errand

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of investigation? Or was the little marquise herself merely acting up to the very limits of the part assigned to her? In any case, and more than ever, did all my former doubts and disapprovals gather thick before me. I would, at least, clasp hands with the opportunity offered. I would present such outlines of Carola's history as the marquise, with her more or less complete ignorance of American women, might possibly comprehend.

Carola Marlborough, I began, was indeed a very rich woman. At that announcement, the marquise's face cleared. The chief corner-stone in the edifice of her "dear boy's" happiness, should the marriage come off, would be secure. One read that comfortable conclusion in the sleek smile. She leant back in her deep chair, folded her hands, and listened to the very end of my recital with the look of one who, at last, was in close touch with the actualities of a situation as interesting—and as exciting—as any drama. Madame de Pennedepie was, indeed, thoroughly enjoying herself.

Carola had been left, I went on, by her father, a sufficiently handsome fortune. A Chicago uncle on his death-bed, a few years later, bequeathed to Carola his several millions. To some lucky beings, one fortuitous happening seems to call forth another gift from the hands of the gods. Carola Winches-

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ter had had but a year to revel in an American girl's enlarged sense of the joy of life, as mistress of her time, her millions, and her easily-led mother, when she had met and married John Marlborough. The god of luck had placed in that gentleman's lips, at birth, not one, but two, golden spoons. The Marlboroughs' reign on Beacon Street had begun with that pastoral period of our national history when Governor John Hancock's cows were privileged to nibble grass off the otherwise sacred Common. Two centuries of profitable commercial dealings with India, and in the China seas, had resulted in an accumulated fortune, one which had made leisure the only possible industry for the present generation of Marlboroughs.

It was generously admitted, even by the most envious lookers-on at the all-too-brief married felicity of the Marlboroughs, that they had lived up to their opportunities. Neither John nor Carola had been cast in the domestic mould. Life might be a bubble but their object was to catch, and to seize, if possible, its gleam. For four exciting years, the two chased, with unabated ardor, the ball of pleasure; their eager hands followed its roll across seas, in a royally equipped yacht, and on land, from presentations at court to the Moulin Rouge. They were partners in felicity and speculators in chance adven-

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ture, as others are linked together for the prosaic pursuit of bread and butter.

The end came, as all things end, in a world whose law is change. John Marlborough's passion for athletics had led him to overstrain, in that curiously misnamed sport of throwing the hammer. Having entered a contest between Englishmen and Americans, one given at Hurlingham, Marlborough had proved the American superiority in a wielding of the hammer, as, subsequently, he had furnished surgery with one more chance for triumphantly trumpeting the success of a difficult operation, one which, however, had been quickly followed by the inconsiderate death of the patient.

Carola had mourned her young husband with a persistency of grief that testified to the real warmth of her nature. She lived quietly, for a time, and then travel and change had brought their gradual healing.

In the five years that had passed since her husband's death, Carola had recaptured much of her former *joie de vivre*. The world has innumerable ways for pressing the poppy of forgetfulness to the lips of a widow, young, beautiful, and one possessed of those two rarely yoked gifts—perfect health and increased dividends.

Once more the roll of the ball of pleasure lured

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Carola to energetic following. There were the capitals of the world, offering their feverish gayeties; and there was an importunate crop of suitors to give zest and emotional variety to every sojourn in Rome, Paris, London, or New York.

The marquise's color had risen, during this narration. The history of this interesting widow had certain aspects that made her own mission—and, in consequence, the Baron de Gaspé-Royale's prospects—assume, apparently, a more doubtful complexion. The attitude of gracious condescension had been insensibly lessened; the lady's face now wore an expression of anxiety.

The edged border of the Honiton lace handkerchief was being frilled and pressed in between the cotton gloved fingers. The marquise was assembling a fresh array of arguments, as she worked her fingers, nervously.

"Suitors, yes!" she finally ejaculated. "Yes, I can understand your charming friend has had many offers. But, surely, the Baron de Gaspé-Royale——!" And the little marquise let her handkerchief fall to her lap, to open her hands wide, as though to fill the room with the magnificence of this particular *prétendant*.

"I am aware, as I have told you, of the great name your friend bears, and also how nobly he wears

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it. But, Carola, you see, cares so little for rank. There was, for example, Prince de B-X——, a prince of royal blood!”

“She refuses princes of the house of B-X——!” cried the marquise, her amazement breaking into shrill treble notes.

The fact of refusing to wed impecunious princes affected Madame de Pennedepie as nothing in Carola’s past had done. She gave several thoughtful moments to assimilating this extraordinary information.

“Then, Madame Marlborough is very self-willed—very *difficile*—as we say?” was the final summary of what Carola’s countrywomen knew to be strength of character.

At this point, I confess, I was becoming impatient. Why should I be forced to this impossible task—to listening to absurd and wholly ignorant versions of every statement made? And why should I, of all people, who believed the happiest marriages were made between fellow-countrymen and women, have to appear in the false light of a go-between?

Madame de Pennedepie must have seen a change in my attitude. Those penetrating eyes had, all this time, been fixed, steadfastly, on my face. She rose, with easy grace, as she made her parting shot, one she obviously hoped might prove effective.

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"But, of course, you know, Baron de Gaspé-Royale cannot be classed with these gentlemen. He is, like your friend, also immensely rich. He can have no reason to seek a *dot* with his wife." And she gave me two or three reassuring nods, as she added, "And now, dear friend, you will plead Gaston's suit, will you not?"

"On the contrary," I answered, "I must absolutely refuse my help. Frankly, I do not believe in foreign marriages, for Americans. Mrs. Marlborough's character is such I do not feel sure of her fitting into a French *milieu*. Still, if she cares enough——"

"Ah—if she cares enough!" softly echoed Madame de Pennedepie. "I see," she added, her thought traveling as she spoke—"I see—Gaston must be willing to wait—to be kept on probation——"

"Exactly."

The attempt to place the great prize in such an unlooked-for frame, seemed beyond the power of Madame de Pennedepie's grasping. She had a lost air, as she twirled the coral-handled parasol. She gathered her lace ruffle the closer about her neck, with a distraught expression. Finally, confronted with my unrelenting attitude, she wailed, in gentle tones:

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"And so this is what I must take back to Gaston—that he must wait—must be content to hope—?"

"Perhaps, but I would suggest he's not building too much on that foundation. Mrs. Marlborough may very well decide, in the end, to marry an American—if she marries at all."

The fall of this last straw was more than the Baron's ambassadress could sustain. She lifted a depressed face, from which all the life had faded.

"There are also Americans?"

"Any number——"

There was a moment of silence. The marquise stood on the perron; her victoria was drawn up before the steps. As she looked into the empty seat, where she had sat, in such confident pride, a short hour before, she murmured, "Poor Gaston! And I, who thought his happiness so assured!"

As the green gown, with its changeable lights, trailed down the perron steps, its voluminous folds seemed to gather the closer together, as though even inanimate materials could feel the weight of depression occasioned by the fact of a Gaston Henri Duchesne de Provence Carloman de Gaspé-Royale having to wait upon the capricious decision of a lady from Boston!

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Chapter XVI

CAROLA'S FLIGHT

"OH-H—why did he? Why couldn't he leave things as they were?" Carola stood before me, wringing her hands, as I finished my account of Madame de Pennedepie's visit.

Regret, dismay, the swift flash of semi-anger, to be as quickly followed by a look of blank despair—such were the changes that swept over Carola's face as she fronted this new aspect of the situation. She began walking about, distraught, with stumbling steps.

The first spasm of surprised irritation once passed, Carola's decision was quickly made.

"Of course, this changes everything. I shall not depart from the course I have, all along, insisted I must follow, as the only possible—the only safe one, for me. I cannot give an affirmative answer now. Nor can I—nor—oh, my dear!—can't you see how it is with me? I can't say no. I like him too much——"

Poor Carola stood, still wringing her hands, with a look of distress on her face that made one's heart-beats quicken. The very cadence in her voice, as she murmured her confession, proved how deep was her



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feeling, how torn was her soul with conflicting emotions.

In the end, she came to see the wisdom of choosing absence as the best test for this budding passion. "I shall go away immediately. I'll run off, in the car, with Miss West—no later than this very day." And Carola showed the fire of her ardor by beginning to gather up her belongings with fierce clutches; and she walked to and fro, talking, gesticulating, explaining, as she snatched a gown here, a blouse from a near chair, or crushed her best hat, superbly indifferent to consequences, into her overfull hat-box.

"I'll tour down to Italy,—too hot, you say? Well, to Switzerland, then. I'll do the passes. That'll cool me off," and she laughed a trifle wildly. "I'll take the remainder of the summer to thinking over my destiny, on the Alpine heights——"

"And suppose he follows after?" I was moved to insinuate.

Carola turned on me at last a smiling face—one almost roguish. The sprite in her sprang for an instant into play. "Well—there would be then two of us to decide the great question!"

She sobered, however, as quickly; she crouched at my knees, as she put her arms about me. "Dear—be good to me—and to him. Keep my secret until

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I bid you divulge it. His happiness and mine are at stake. And I must be alone—I must have long quiet hours, with the stars, with nothing between me and Heaven but my doubting heart.”

Depths stood revealed in Carola’s eyes I had never dreamed her nature capable of sounding. Her capacity for mastering emotion, for dominating the softer side of feeling, and her resourceful command of opportunity, proved her strength of character.

She was off and away, on her secret flight, before it seemed possible so hasty a project could have been acted upon. There was a hurriedly written note left to her lover, with never a word of explanation. In our turn, flight seemed the only refuge from the Baron’s interminable questionings, from his equally interminable visits.

Chapter XVII

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

ON our return to the Manoir, we were met by a fusillade of telegrams from Carola Marlborough. The touring trip to Switzerland had been extended to the Touraine Châteaux country. It was scarcely a surprise to learn that Baron de Gaspé-Royale had been finally admitted, as the third to the small party. He had joined Carola at Blois.

"He is in love—and he is determined to have her. If he shows her Louprouge, the die is cast," I said, with a half sigh.

"They were at Louprouge yesterday, as it happens." The last dispatch was passed to me.

"That settles it, I fear."

Yet why should fears and doubts assail one? Carola was, surely, at an age to know her own mind. Two years of a happy marriage, and five of a widowhood passed chiefly in refusing the many honestly attracted suitors, who had pursued her, and in scorning those of the Prince de B——x order who had pursued her fortune—surely such experiences ought to have developed judgment—a clearer knowledge of men. Carola was also too clear-sighted not

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to have acquired some perception of the needs of her own nature and of the drift of her tastes.

Yet—yet—yet—there looms large before American eyes the spectre of apprehension, in learning of a possible international marriage. What, after all, even after some months of each year spent in foreign travel, do most American women know of the essential, the intimate nature of a Frenchman? Such knowledge comes, usually, only after marriage, to end, alas! so often in the tragedy of the divorce court. When such a mixed marriage is successful, then it is because the American has conformed to foreign ways, foreign customs, has become, in a word, as far as possible a Frenchwoman.

To conceive of Carola Marlborough's submitting to any standards save those including absolute independence of action, freedom to live her own life, and in her own way, was unimaginable. The Baron might be all his friend the Marquis had described; his qualities of mind and taste might be of an exquisite refinement; his nature and character unusual in elevation of purpose, possessing real distinction, still, between these two was there not yawning the chasmal difference of racial inheritance, of religious training, of all that makes the New World differ so radically from the Old? The thought of a consummation of the marital tie between these two, brought, there-

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fore, an apprehensive shudder. One was dimly conscious of a persistent, constant preoccupation; the mind could not be freed of shadowing doubts, of a whole troop of ill-featured fears.

When Carola finally appeared, her confident joy dispelled this dismal company. With her first embrace she announced the great fact. She was radiantly certain of having arrived at her decision through "weeks of earnest thought!"

"Of course, I liked him," she began, her confession following her descent from her car, having, indeed, begun with the unwrapping of her happy, blooming face from her enveloping veils, "from the very first. You saw that, at the outset. He was so different—so wholly unlike any of the others. I'm not speaking only of Frenchmen—but, come, be frank, isn't he a wonderful contrast to most men, even to most Americans?" She stopped for an instant to disentangle a rebellious knot in her veil. "He is really unique—a something left over," she went on breathlessly.

"I grant you he's——"

The words were divined before they were uttered.

"Oh, I know you like him. That gave me the courage to go on, when I found I was getting in too deep. No, no more sugar, thanks.—Where was I? Oh, yes—I was saying he is a survival. That is

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the word. He is like that delightful character in Bourget's 'L'Emigré'—don't you remember? The one Guitry acted? And, of course, he isn't a spend-thrift. You should see Louprouge! It's a royal seat."

"Ah, Louprouge! I feared . . ." The words were taken from me.

"That it would be in ruin? That all my fortune would have to be spent in roofing, in repairing, in keeping the place up? How little you know Gaston! He's the soul of order. His place is like those great English seats—only grander—more ideally feudal. You could walk all over the grounds and park in a satin slipper. Then there are acres—acres! Some more tea, please—thanks!"

"I thought your Gaston disliked . . ."

"Company? Poor dear—of course he did, when he had to do it all alone. I've explained to him he'll never need to be bothered. I'll run all the house parties. He smiles so adoringly! He is such a dear!"

To attempt to head off so tumultuous a stream was waste force. Neither during that first outpouring, nor in subsequent meetings, was it possible to place in the scale of the bride-elect's really bubbling happiness the counterweight of cold reason. Carola had received, it was obvious, as well as her Gaston, her own "lightning stroke." Those who lift their

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voices in warning, once Cupid has planted his dart! . . .

A week or two later, in Paris, to which capital I was summoned by an imperative appeal and command in onè, for no less a serious mission than the choosing of the wedding gown, Carola deigned to give a series of arguments she considered to be irresistibly convincing.

With her customary scorn of time and place, the *milieu* chosen for this somewhat intimate disclosure was the large, airy salon of a great Parisian maddressmaker.

The usual procession of models, deploying their mechanical grace round and round, in a circle—these human manikins were followed by the eyes of a mixed company. Keen-eyed American ladies, English women of title, Jew-nosed buyers of foreign houses, with here and there a stray husband, whose glances alone were fixed on the girls' faces rather than on the season's "creations," gave a solemnity to the occasion which would have surprised our original parent.

Carola paid slight attention to the revolving models. She was absorbed in continuing a conversation begun in the automobile. During the rush from our hotel to the rue de la Paix, I had had time to present a few of the haunting spectres of

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doubt that had assailed me. I knew them to be quite futile, perhaps even in questionable taste, considering the nature of our errand. The ghost of a New England conscience, however, would perhaps, cease to flaunt its annoying presence were the warning note trumpeted.

Carola listened to the counsel with reassuring meekness. She even went to the amazing length of admitting a possibility of her coming marriage resulting in quasi-failure. . . .

"You see, marriage is no longer, anywhere, what it used to be. Women are changed. And so we've changed marriage."

"Isn't it rather the men, chiefly our American men, who, in giving us their extraordinarily generous laws, have virtually loosened the knot that tied us to them?"

"Oh, yes, it's that, and it's everything else. It's the twentieth century, coming after all the nineteenth century gave us. It's the changes Darwin and Huxley and Spencer brought about, in people's beliefs and opinions. It's the dramas of Ibsen and Maeterlinck, it's the dismal Nietzsche doctrine in the air," said Carola, soberly, giving one the surprise of clear, intellectual reasoning, a mental contradiction that was in such startling relief to her customary flighty, all but flippant attitude. The

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years she had spent in Boston had left a sediment of culture in this pleasure-loving soul.

This serious mood was quickly dispelled. The sight of the last model, her neck and arms in the traditional black jersey, while below the bust there flowed the chiffon foam of white lace, sufficed to restore Carola to her normal mental state.

"Oh, dear, no! Not that! Not white, of all things!" she protested, in delicate scorn of the over-elaborate gown. "Send me Mademoiselle Louise. She'll know what I need." And while waiting for her favorite fitter, Carola took time to empty her mind of some fragments still left from our talk in the car.

"You see, my dear," she began, laying an impressive hand on my arm, "I am not really as scattered-brained, or so impulsive, as you think me. I took time . . ."

"Barely two months!"

"An eternity, when you see a man every day. For you may believe me or not, but I intended to be perfectly sure—to test Gaston, to prove him in every way. I showed him all my own worst, my most trying traits. You needn't smile——"

"When people are in love, what do they really see?"

"Nonsense! Ah, Mademoiselle Louise, I'm glad

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you are here, at last. Come nearer, please. I have something particular to say.—Ah, you know it? You saw the announcement, in the paper? My dear”—turning to me—“can one keep a single thing out of the papers? Now you know, what are you going to show me?”

There were several minutes given to whispered conferences. Finally, after solemn cogitation, the color was decided upon. “Yes, it must be pearl or gray—or lavender—you see, I’ve been married before. No—no—not white. I told you I have been married before. I want a widow’s proper marriage gown. That lavender over yonder,—send in a man-ikin with something really new, not these old things. Why, my dear, I saw those models in June!”

For a brief period we had the salon to ourselves. It was the luncheon hour, and the professional buyers and the connoisseur feminine groups had departed. The models were long in changing from ball gowns to “a widow’s proper marriage robes”; one suspected them of chance shots at their own mid-day meal.

The quasi-privacy incited Carola to the last unburdening of her mind.

“As I said, I put him through any number of proofs, of tests. So I made him do all Normandy and Touraine, in the car. A country house used to

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be the best test of a man's character. Now it is the automobile."

"I thought your Gaston hated automobiles——"

"So he did—does—for all I know. That was why the trip was absolutely necessary, that was what made the touring really valuable. If a man, loathing a car, could stand a six-weeks' strain, and the test of being seen in all weathers, moods and seasons—yes—that is the thing——"

A manikin had returned, and was crossing the field of critical vision. For an hour or more, it was the gown and not the man that absorbed attention.

A few weeks later, Carola Marlborough was kneeling beside her husband before the brilliantly lighted altar of St. Clothilde. Her sweeping draperies, with their faint lilac tints, were in effective harmony with the masses of blue and lilac hydrangeas. The low mass over, the crowd of friends that had filled the church wended their way to the vestry. The bride and groom, who stood awaiting the congratulations of "*Tout Paris*" and half Boston, showed countenances glistening with happiness; something of the vibration of their joy was communicated to the guests. The true wedding bells were those heard ringing from the gay voices, wishing the handsome couple an enduring felicity.

A year later, I had the following letter from

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India. Carola wrote in her usual laconic, telegraphic style:

"My dear—India is great—and so is Gaston. He is really adorable—quite good enough to be an American. He won't let me lift my finger—actually carries me up and down the Temple steps, himself. Taje Mehal hasn't been overwritten up. It is tremendous. Gaston says quite wonderful things about it and about the Buddhist religion and the people here. It appears he read a lot about the country, that time he was alone. He could write about it all really much better than Pierre Loti. We are coming home immediately. . . . Am splendidly well. Love to the Châtelain—and remember me to those nice people, the Marquis and his dear little wife, I forgot their names, and Gaston isn't here to play social register.

"Yours, CAROLA."

Gaston de Gaspé-Royale playing "social register!" What extraordinary transformations will not love and marriage effect!

Chapter XVIII

EPILOGUE

A FETE AT THE CHATEAU DE LOUPROUGE

THE *salle de fête* at Louprouge was filled with a crowd that overflowed the boundaries of the long room. The painted nymphs that floated among the tinted clouds of the ceiling saw their doubles in some of the ladies seated beneath them. Yet fresh and fair were many of the faces that rose above the tulle and gauze bodices. The softening candle glow, shed downwards from dozens of antique chandeliers and dull gold side-lights, were kind to the less brilliant complexions.

The scene was full of color, movement and animation. The bright silk and satin gowns of the more elderly women; the gossamer dresses of the young girls and youthful married ladies; the brilliant uniforms of some of the officers from the near garrisons; and the more resplendent liveries of the laquais,—the latter moving with difficulty in among the serried ranks of the closely packed chairs—these contrasting stuffs and colors were set off by the incessant activity, by the graceful gestures, and by the expressive play of eye and lip French men and women use as part of their effective speech.

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Outside the hall, through the long windows, vistas of paths, trees and allées were descried. This outdoor scene was lighted with fantastic lanterns. Grotesque caricatures of birds, of miniature monkeys, of flying fishes—with their red and yellow lights—lit up great spaces of the lawns; leaping fountains came into vivid relief and crimson beds of begonias or a monster group of oaks were seen under the glow of burning blue or crimson *feux de Bengale*.

Within the great room, a certain space marked the line that, in France, defines the chasm that separates the entertained from the entertainer.

At the further end of the hall, sat a group of men and women whose costumes and whose general aspect were in startling contrast to the crowd of guests. Curious eyes were fixed on this interesting group. One heard whispered conjectures as to the identity of the actors.

“That one—over yonder—in the Greek dress, and the gold crown—how beautiful she is!——”

A Parisian, close to the speaker, remarked with authoritative accent, as he lifted his glass, “She holds her years well—Ségond-Weber never loses her tragic pose.”

“Surely that man talking to her is Lambert *fils*!”

“Yes,—they are to give us de Musset’s ‘Nuits de Mai’—presently.”

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The actors, meanwhile, were showing no sort of interest in those they were to hold spellbound, in a few moments, with their art. The sight of an audience, whether at close range or the other side of the footlights, to them was no novelty. These world-famous men and women talked, laughed, with discretion, sat or moved restlessly—eager to have their number over—with the indifference of celebrities to a world of which they could form no part.

Our hostess had twice crossed the space separating the two worlds. She had been quick to offer her personal applause to the actor who had given a spirited rendering of Chantecler's "Ode to the Sun."

Once again the room was quieting down; Madame Ségond-Weber and Lambert *fils* had taken up their positions for the opening lines of de Musset's poem.

As the melodious voices filled the room, I seized the chance to look upon the crowd of faces—of the few familiar, of the many unknown, among this Tourangeais world.

The little Vicomtesse de Castel was easily distinguishable. She was more brilliantly decorated than ever. Seated beside her was her eldest daughter, whose blond beauty showed the freshness her mother copied. A few seats beyond, sat the Marquise de Pennedepie. She wore her coronet, one of the few jewels saved from the wreck of the family fortune.

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Beneath the blaze of diamonds and flashing emeralds, her delicate features seemed reduced in size, as the faded brocade of her antique ball gown, of the fashion of a long-ago century, proved the sad decline of the ancestral revenues. But the lady's smile, since her arrival at Louprouge, like the northern sun, had known no setting—it was now more irradiant than ever. For was not this splendid scene,—was not the happiness of her dear “boy”—was not the very birth of the son and heir—now peacefully reposing in his nursery—was not all this wonderful combination of fortuitous circumstance due to her? Had she not, in a word, brought about the marriage of her Gaston and the lovely American? As an achievement, her smile said, to all other envious matchmakers, this was, if you please, one worthy of self-applause.

Next the Marquise sat the Duchesse de St. Rock. Although this great lady's ducal coronet, with its three monster jewels, towered above the de Pennedepie tiara, as the lady herself, with her erect carriage and stately mien seemed to over-top most of the lesser provincial notabilities about her, her grace showed the Parisian front of quasi-indifference to the entertainment. One might have read in her wandering glance the more or less blasé look with which—for half a century or more—she had listened to great

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actors—in provincial châteaux—and had examined—through her gold lorgnon—provincial gatherings. To such fêtes she did not come to amuse herself. She came as a patriot goes to a parade—to uphold the flag; or as a peeress goes to court—to prove her right to be there, and to preserve the family tradition. Her host was her cousin—once removed; as *chef-de-famille* she must be present at this the first festivity given in the historic Château since Gaston de Gaspé-Royale came of age. Although he had so far departed from the family traditions as to take an American wife—one of course “not born”—and it appeared an unconvertible *Puritaine*—a Protestant—still this alliance had one great redeeming feature; the American’s millions made the de Gaspé-Royale revenues secure for centuries, even though France itself should fall.

The duchess’ niece, Claire de Montel, was seated at the side of the room. On a high velvet bench, one upraised above those immediately around her, Claire, in her floating tulle scarf, in her gossamer laces, with her long *sautoir* of pearls, was the centre of some of the more distinguished men present. There was the General de X—— at her left; he felt himself especially flattered since she had given him her fan to hold—a sign Madame de Montel intended to keep the famous soldier beside her. The renowned archæ-

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ologist, Monsieur de Grez, one of Gaston's most intimate friends, was next the General. To the handsome young fop, the latest leader of cotillons, in Paris and in the fashionable world of Dinard—that Parisian succursale—Claire was sweeping glances that sent the novice in such rites to a Heaven of anticipatory hope.

There was one face close to Madame de Montel that was at once strangely familiar and yet unfamiliar. The lady had bowed to me during the evening; and then noting, doubtless, my blank look had turned away with an amused countenance. Even now, our eyes had met; and there flashed to my mind the mystery of a resemblance that had baffled me.

A pause in the performance announced the Muse was gliding away from her poet. Ségond-Weber was bowing, hand-in-hand with her fellow-actor; and both were turning to reseal themselves in the fauteuils at the back of the improvised stage.

Curiosity could no longer be held in check. Of my neighbor, the Marquis de Pennedepie, I asked, with quivering eagerness:

“Surely that lady yonder is the Vicomtesse de Grasse!”

“No longer de Grasse, dear lady, but Madame Boulanger——”

“She is married—re-married?” I asked, though I

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did not need the answer to confirm the certainty. The French widow of four seasons ago was resplendent. It was her magnificence that had put me off.

"You have not heard? You did not know?" cried my friend, in a maze of mingled astonishment and amusement. "Ah! I forgot, when the great news reached us, you were away."

"Well—and who is Monsieur Boulanger? Although—I need not ask. He is surely a commercial person, with a wonderful knowledge of gems. Look at those pearls! They are a king's ransom!"

"Quite true—and you have correctly divined the status of Hélène's husband. Only, one thing you could not guess—you could never imagine where they live——" and the Marquis was looking at me with eyes that overran with mirth.

I clapped my hands, in triumph. "You are telling me——It was he——this Monsieur Boulanger—who bought Quatre Tours!"

The Marquis gave a pleased chuckle. "Yes—you are right. And Hélène de Grasse—née de Clermont, and now simple Madame Boulanger, reigns in the seat of my ancestors."

"Oh,—no-o, not simple!" and as we jointly took note of the elaborate spectacle of Madame Boulanger's splendor, we laughed aloud. The gown that was paraded before my astonished eyes, might have

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been worn—appropriately—by a reigning sovereign. It was a miracle of embroideries, of pearl and glittering strasse incrustations, of lace and fur combinations. Her *décolletage* proved the lesson learned in the period of her widowhood had not been forgotten; one felt grateful for the rows of jewels that held the bodice in place. The tiara of huge solitaires that crowned the lady's tresses, and the rain of monster pearls that fell from her throat to her knees was a sufficient explanation for the acquisition of Monsieur Boulanger. Had that gentleman, hitherto, only spoken the prose of trade all his life, at least since his marriage he had indulged in the poetry of princely extravagance.

I kept plying the Marquis with questions. "How had Madame de Grasse happened to meet this gentleman in trade? He, at least, could never have been within the boundaries of her own world."

"Ah-h, there was a good fairy—if ever fairies take masculine shape, at work. Do you remember the abbé—l'abbé de La Tour? He it was who made the match. He took Hélène's sad case to heart. He knew Boulanger, felt him to be the right man—for he is immensely rich—and had he not bought Quatre Tours? Enormously ambitious, Boulanger only needed a clever wife—one 'born' to complete his happiness."

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"And H  l  ne—will she succeed? Is he presentable?"

"There is the gentleman in question." Monsieur de Pennedepie nodded towards a group of gentlemen circling about a heavy-browed, thick-set man. The face of this former umbrella-maker was deeply lined. But the expression was that of a man of power. It was the face of the middle-class man whose success had been won with hard knocks, given and taken. The gentlemen with him looked their rank and calling; they had lived the life of the sportsman, of the *flaneur*.

"Succeed?" the Marquise went on. "Dear lady, every one of those men who surround him will open wide their doors. He is now in finance—he can give them tips—and of finance my class is as ignorant as a butterfly is of its chrysalis stage."

"I see—Monsieur Boulanger will get to be friends with the surrounding nobility—and H  l  ne will presently buy him a title."

"Precisely."

"After our visit here is over," my friend gave me an amused, semi-malicious glance, "Germane and I go once more to Quatre Tours—H  l  ne's guests. Imagine whether H  l  ne will be glad to see us! Ah! the seat of one's ancestors! It is sometimes a good thing—to have had!" The smile that finished the

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sentence was, I thought, less courageously philosophic than usual.

The noise, meanwhile, about us had sensibly increased. The champagne the laquais had been assiduously passing had loosened the glib French tongues. The ladies grew pinker—or over-red. The men's voices were pitched in a higher key. Those who were bending over the white shoulders of their neighbors assumed a tender attitude; there were whispering tones; feminine faces were turned upwards; these had a languorous, amorous air. One felt the communicative thrill of an electric current passing from lip to eye,—between the elbows that touched.

In and out among her guests, Carola de Gaspé-Royale moved with her new step, her acquired grace. There was a something lost, a something gained in this, her later development. One missed the old radiance; but there was a more perfect poise. The American impulsive movement, the freshness, the open candor, were gone. One had the sense of a guarded self-restraint, of a watchful, alert intensity of outlook. The face had grown longer, thinner. The delicate bloom of earlier womanhood was also gone. There were tell-tale lines about the eyes and mouth that told of a life lived at a high physical pressure. The smile—that smile that had been like the open

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petals of a rose on Carola's lips, proving her bloom of joy under the constant sun of pleasure—this smile was now rare; it was that of a less easily pleased woman.

As I watched Carola moving among her guests, her lips, I noted, were set in the fixity of a determined effort to please. Yet what a pleasure to follow the grace of her tall figure! How she queened it here in this semi-royal state!

"She is more beautiful than ever!" was the Marquis de Pennedepie's rapturous exclamation, as his glance swept our hostess' satin-clad shape.

"She has changed—I have not decided whether it is for the better," I half sighed. I had the feeling of a personal loss—yet I could not have defined what it was I was mourning.

Whenever Carola happened to be near her husband, her face showed something of the old gladness, the familiar joy. There was no bad news to be feared from that quarter, that was evident. The note of perfect understanding between the two was clearly revealed. Whenever Carola left his side, her husband's eyes followed her with a glance that was the lover's—still.

An hour later only those guests composing the house-party were gathered together about the tea-

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table. Even here the little groups made each a separate circle; there appeared to be none of that instinct of sociability, that irrepressible necessity of gregariousness one finds in our own reunions.

The duchess sat apart with the Marquis de Penne-depie. Claire de Montel was continuing her lessons in the art of raising false hopes for the benefit of the young. She and the leader of cotillons had retired to a broad window seat. The little Marquise was in deep consultation with the elderly General. Our host had disappeared with the other male guests into the smoking-room.

For the first time since my arrival, Carola and I were alone.

"After the others have gone to bed—come to my room, will you, dear?" She was passing me a cup as she bent her head. She swept a faint smile, one that seemed tinged with a certain bitterness, over the groups that were so cosily arranged, at the more distant parts of the room. But the smile and glance were quickly suppressed. We continued a desultory talk until the moment came for us to climb the great staircase, on our way to bed.

Carola stood at the foot of the branching steps; she handed to each guest as they came forward, their silver candle-stick.

"*Bonsoir, ma cousine*——" said the duchess, in a

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tired voice. She imprinted an indifferent kiss on Carola's forehead. But, weary though she was, she did not omit to pay for her evening in civility. "Charming—my dear—your entertainment was a great success." And with her heavy step she began her ascent of the long, wide stairs.

The Marquise de Pennedepie gave Carola the brief French salute, but on both cheeks. Her face shone with the gratified sense of her own immense achievement. "What an evening! What a splendid fête—chérie! And you were charming—dear—I watched you! I saw how admirably you carried the whole thing off!" The Marquise gave her hostess a last little pat of approbation. Had she not been her providence—her fairy-godmother?

Claire de Montel alone swept her good-night kiss with genuine fervor. She put an arm about Carola. As she drew her toward her, she whispered, "It was very amusing—chère—you were wonderful to think it all out—to make it such a go! *A demain*—n'est-ce-pas? Ah—I forgot—you go to chapel——" and she made a little mou with her pretty lips before she imprinted another kiss. She added, "We meet after mass—then."

The other ladies, from the more distant châteaux, followed. The soft candlelight fell on the satin trains, on the bent backs of the elderly women, on the

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snowy shoulders of the younger ones, as each in turn mounted the great marble stairway, stopped for a moment on the landing, and was then lost in the bend that led to the upper gallery.

A half hour later I knocked at Carola's door. She opened it on the instant. She grasped my extended hand, pulled me inwards, to clasp me in her arms. There was a break in her voice, as she half sobbed, half laughed, "Oh—you dear—you dear! how I have longed for you!"

We were soon seated close together, on a *causeuse* that was drawn up to the open fire. For in early October Touraine has its autumnal chill—at long past midnight.

"Well. . . ."

For all answer, we kept on looking at each other. Then Carola drew me closer. There was the grip of a something long-repressed, a something exultant, in her tightened arm. Carola's face shone with a joy there was no mistaking. And now her words came hurriedly—with an all but passionate intensity. There was a half-sob—instantly checked.

"No—Oh! don't say anything—not yet! only let me feel the delight in you—the gladness of having you here—of knowing we can talk and talk—that I can say everything—need not explain—that I can speak my language—that you will understand, and

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will not weigh, will not be making inward reflections—Ah! those hateful mental asides these people make, to everything we Americans say! and whose meaning we read—so clearly in their eyes!”

And then she kissed me again. “But surely—Carola, they are kind to you—they like you!”

She gave me a tighter squeeze. “Oh, yes,” she acquiesced, but with a drop in her tone, “They are kind; of course—and I think most of my neighbors, and most of Gaston’s people like me, well enough. But you see, I am not one of them. I speak another language. Did you notice how they all scattered to-night? ‘All the little groups?’ It is always like that. They do not feel at ease when I am among them. I am the foreigner. There are always, everywhere, little groups—in which, if I appear, I am the interloper.”

“Surely you exaggerate. You are rather a new-comer—you have only been here three years.”

Carola shook her head. “No—it isn’t the years that count. Or rather, it is. To be transplanted and become a Frenchwoman, one should come here young—one should marry in one’s teens. Then—perhaps—but, you see, I am too old to change. I have a whole heritage of traditions, of fixed ideals, of rigid conceptions of duty, of—oh! of everything that goes to make up conduct and belief in things.”

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"But Gaston—surely to your husband this chasm——"

She did not let me finish. "Gaston is perfect. He is adorable. We have a beautiful life. If we could only live for ourselves, if we could have our own little world, the one he really cares for, and the one that interests me—for I love his dry books, his fossils, his collections——"

"Well?"

"Ah—dear, things are changed. Gaston feels he must live up to his position. He cannot now play the hermit. We must entertain, we must not close our big doors—we have the children to think of——"

"What darlings they are!"

Carola's face was once more irradiant. "I am a very happy woman, dear—but—there are these other outward things that make the rift in the lute," and again the shadow passed over her face.

"You shouldn't let these little differences annoy you," I said, consolingly.

"No-o, I suppose not. Only you see, when a woman has had the companionship of our American women—of our men—we miss it. There is no such *camaraderie* over here."

"Surely, you have some dear friends—there is Claire de Montel. She adores you."

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"And I see her once, perhaps twice a year!"

"And here, among your neighbors?"

Carola gave an expressive shrug. "Oh—they are all civil, all very polite. But," and here she gave me a sharp side glance, one that the Carola of four years ago could not have given, "But, you must remember, I am—I have remained a Protestant. That makes all the difference—in the provinces. In Paris it would not count, so much."

A silence followed this outbreak.

"Yes, I know the separateness such a difference in religion makes. You have never thought of changing?"

I was really curious to see how far Carola's foreign life had altered this more intimate attitude.

"Yes——" she admitted "when my boy came, and when he was baptized in the Cathedral, and I knew he would always be a Catholic—that I should never be able to kneel beside him, at church,—I tried. I began my instruction. But Luther, our New England Unitarians, have been too strong for Rome. I am the child of my race, in that as in all else."

She folded her hands between her knees, and looked long into the dying fire. Presently she lifted her head, and a sudden mist came into her eyes, as she murmured, in a strained voice, "Do you know

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what chiefly makes me sad? I am homesick—yes—often. I miss my old life, its gayety, its joyous *camaraderie*, its freedom. But there are the deeper joys. There is Gaston—there are my children. But when I go off alone in my pony-cart—to chapel, and see Gaston driving away from me, with my little boy beside him—and I know they are praying side by side—oh, then it seems as if my heart would burst! Even God Himself seems far away, then!”

There came a knock at the door. A man’s voice said: “Chère—may I come in?”

With a dash of her hand across her eyes, Carola had bounded from her seat to the door. “Of course, dear—we were just talking of you.” And she hung upon her husband’s arm.

Gaston stroked her cheek. Then he mocked, lightly, “Were you talking of those days when you didn’t know your mind?”

I left her laughing, as her husband’s arms enfolded her.

The next morning there was a great stamping of horses’ feet on the carriage-road. Several motor-cars were groaning and chug-chugging. Our host chose to drive into Tours in his coach. He had his cousin Claire beside him, on the box seat.

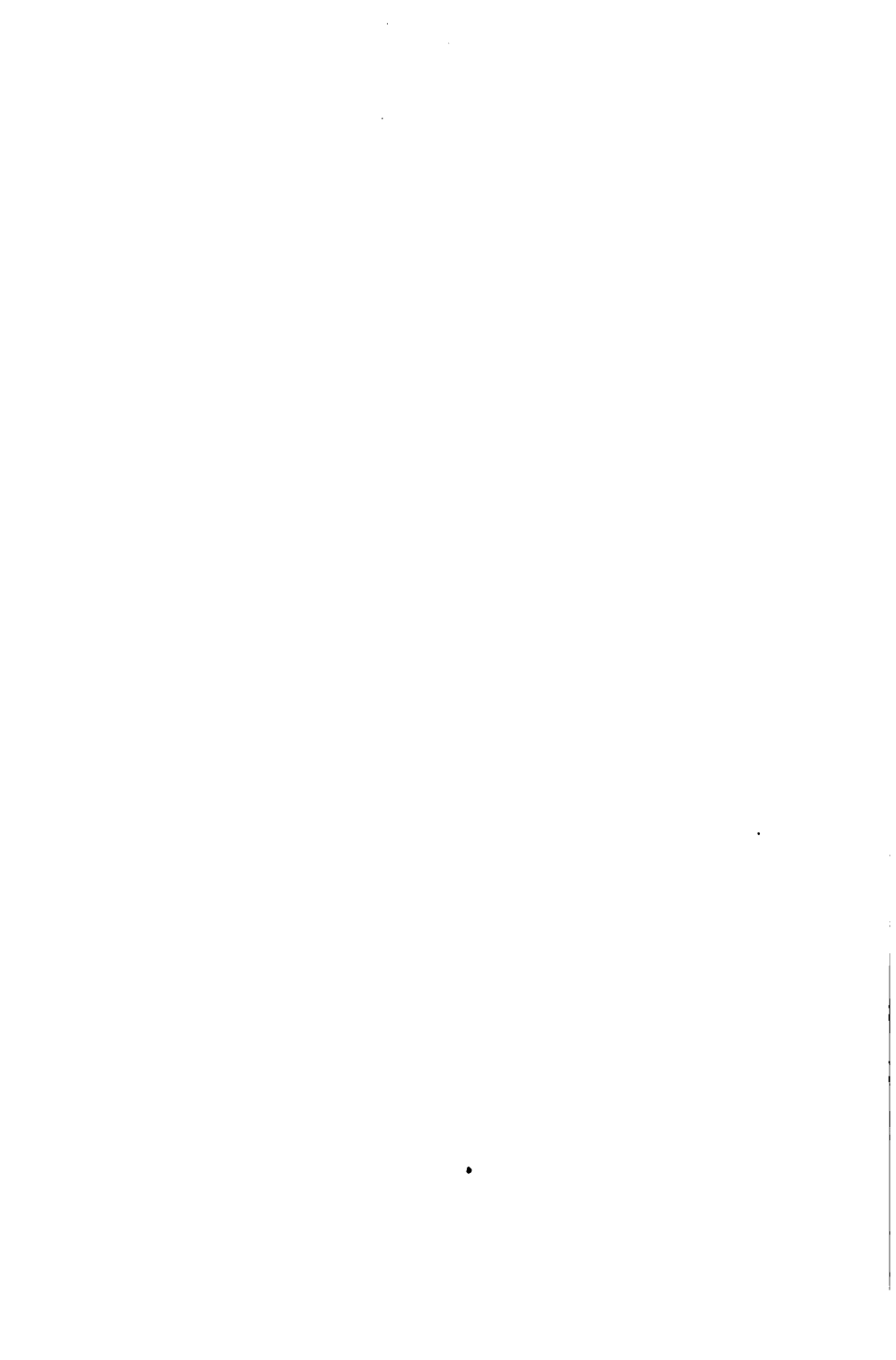
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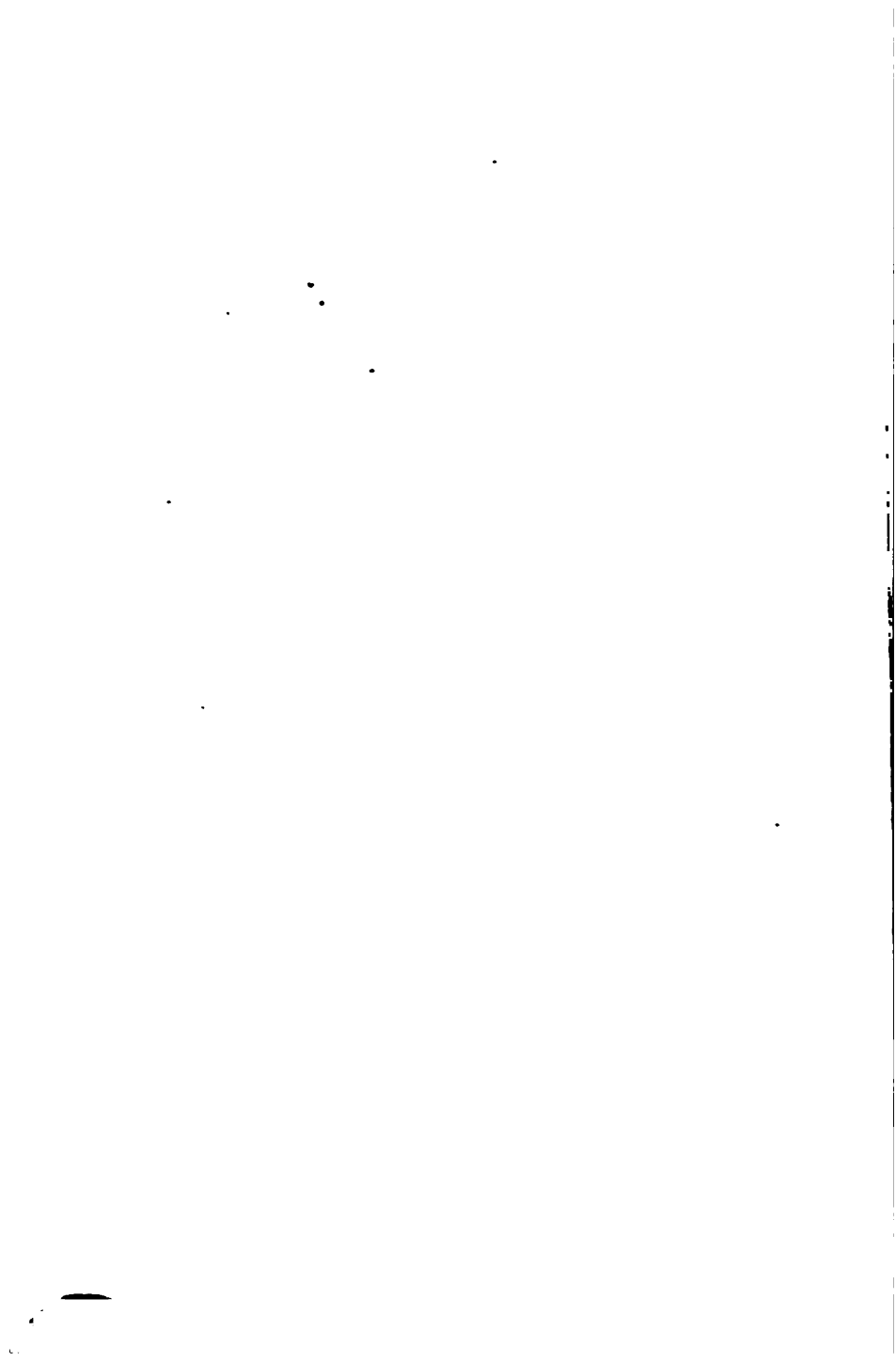
Carola and I were already in her pony-cart. One by one the various equipages swung away from the perron, to take the road that led to the Tours highway. Our direction lay to the east.

Carola kept the coach in sight, as long as she could, by holding in her ponies. But the distance between the coach and the pony-cart seemed to widen and widen. . . .

THE END

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